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THE HUNTING OF MIKE SHAYNE

by Brett Halliday



The whole situation was absurd. Shayne was a private detective, not a jungle explorer. Yet, absurd or not, here he was, trapped in a world he didn't know, hunted by wild beasts, and by the deadliest hunter of all — a man determined to kill him! 4

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It was a simple challenge. All Shayne had to do was fight his way, weaponless, across five miles of deadly jungle to get to his secretary Lucy Hamilton before the giant gorilla got to her. And of course (just so it wouldn't be too easy) there would be a man with a loaded crossbow behind the detective, ready to send a fatal shaft through his heart!

The Hunting of Mike Shayne

by BRETT HALLIDAY

I

WHAT IN HELL WAS HE DOING IN THIS GOD-FORSAKEN JUNGLE?

Rainsford dropped to his knees and tried to catch his breath. Control, he told himself. Control. It was always easy in a training room or on the playing field, but out here, with the temperature well above 100 degrees, it took every bit of energy just to suck in enough air to survive another minute.

A mosquito appeared on his arm and then another. Ever since he had cut his forearm on that thornbush about a mile back, the little suckers seemed to be breeding on him. Flies swarmed around his head, attacking him like small, black kamikazis.

Time to take inventory. His right ankle was swollen, but he'd grown so tired he barely noticed the throbbing. His throat was dry, his stomach empty, and his lungs begged for air.

It would be a long time before he stole another base. Of course if he didn't get out of here — and soon — he wouldn't be stealing any more bases period.

He heard a brusque sound in the tropical forest around him as if some creature were stirring out there. It was too heavy to be a cat. Earlier he had heard some screeching, but decided it must have been a bird. The brush stirred again, but he could see nothing.

Rainsford got to his feet and pulled the compass out of his shredded jeans pocket. He was still heading southwest. He broke off a branch. It gave easily. Fast-growing trees did that, he knew. It wasn't strong, but it felt good in his hand. All day since dawn he had been searching for something to use as a weapon, but despite the five or so miles he estimated having covered, he had seen nothing. Not a rock on the whole island.

He pushed through the thicket. He wondered if he were the first man ever to come through this area. Ordinarily firsts thrilled him. First back at Dewey High to gain a thousand yards. First guy to sleep with Stephanie Gilmore. First draft pick of the Boston Red Sox. But right now only one first dwelt in his mind.

First guy to win The Challenge.

THE GREEN FOLIAGE SEEMED TO BE GROWING IN FRONT OF him. Every time he picked a way to go, a bush or sapling sprang up in front of him.

Then he heard them. The hounds. The hounds were baying ever so faintly. His ears, which had been so finely tuned he could hear the difference in pitches, now picked up the dreaded barking. He had been so far ahead, but now they were catching up like a team with good pitching down the pennant stretch.

Well, all those years of training and working hard had given him an advantage too. When they had first brought him up from Pawtucket to Fenway, he couldn't hit a slider to save his ass. But he had worked at it, and now he was one of the best. He'd win this one too because he wanted it.

This one he'd play like his life depended on it — because it did.

Rainsford broke out of the jungle into a clearing. He was standing on a slight hill above a large pool. Water. Glory, how he needed that.

He slid down the hill on his rear. First he splashed some on his arms, then his face. The stuff was black. He lowered his lips toward the water. It appeared inviting, refreshing. Staring water-level across the pool he noticed the animal. It looked like a huge rat the size of one of those dogs. It was floating on the water.

Poison. He stood up and shook himself off. Pulling some leaves from a tree he tried to dry himself. No damn luck. Some of the liquid had probably gotten into his pores or the open cuts that cross-stitched his

body.

Rainsford screamed involuntarily. It was a stupid thing to do and he hadn't wanted to. He just did it. Screamed in frustration, screamed in self-pity, screamed in anger at his situation.

Where had it all begun? Maybe he had made it to the big leagues too soon. He had gotten a few endorsements and a bonus when he'd jacked thirty-one homers over the Green Monster in left field. He had spent foolishly and invested in a racquetball club that sucked in all his money. Then there were his contract problems. At the end of the season a few weeks ago, he had asked the Sox to renegotiate his contract. They had said no. Cheapskates, he had shouted in the press. They had lost Lynn, Burleson, Fisk, and Lansford because they wouldn't pay them diddly-squat. Of course the bank like everything else in Boston wasn't very sympathetic.

Money, he had needed money, recalled Rainsford as he pressed on southwest. The offer had come in the mail. At first he had thought it was like the Superstars thing on TV.

He couldn't have been more wrong.

Here there was only one event and one rule: get to the other side of the island.

Rainsford remembered the map he had studied the night before. From the pool, the elevation, the position of the sun, and the way he had been moving, he estimated he was three-fourths of the way across. Well, at least he had been in shape from the end of the season. But the body reared on his father's farm in Dewey, Illinois just wasn't used to the jungle — the thick growth, the heat, the flies.

And the pursuers.

Rainsford knew that right behind were the dogs. Maybe he had underestimated The Challenger. Such a slight build. The kind of nerd he had laughed at in high school.

A dog barked and the sound was no longer faint.

Rainsford picked up his pace. Of course The Challenger knew which way he was headed, but the hour's lead should have been enough.

Rainsford tripped on the root of a large tree and sprawled into a thorny bush. It seemed to stab him in fifty places at once. Again the scream was involuntary. He tried to pull loose. His shirt gave, but so did flesh. Blood began to gush from his right arm, the arm the scouts had labelled "a cannon."

He tore loose the baseball shirt from the sharp bush. Pulling out the thorns, he made a tourniquet as he had seen the trainer do, tightening it with a stick he snapped loose.

The brush to the right moved. He stared. It looked black. Back-

ground? No, it moved. It was black and furry and huge and coming toward him.

He hurled his stick at it and it took off into the thicket.

He hurt all over. Worse than the night of the State Championship football game when his father had had to carry him upstairs to bed. His mind felt funny. He couldn't think. Random images popped into his head, but like balloons they broke when he tried to grasp them.

The water had been poisoned.

The dogs barked. They were much closer.

He checked his compass. Still southwest.

Time to change his strategy. He wasn't going to beat The Challenger to the coast. His only chance was to trap his enemy.

But how? Sure he'd grown up on a farm, but his father had never taken him hunting. He had been too busy, always playing ball.

Backtrack. That was what they did in the movies he watched on the tube during roadtrips. Sure, let the dogs go by and jump The Challenger.

But that black, hairy thing was after him.

He needed distance.

RAINSFORD BROKE INTO A LOPE. THE THICKET PARTED AND he crossed it. The adrenalin was pumping now, taking over his body for him, giving him another chance. He crossed into the jungle and ducked under a vine.

A vine. Rainsford yanked hard. His one-hundred-and-ninety pounds straining. The vine gave. Now he had a twelve-foot long weapon. He circled back to the very edge of the thicket.

Crouching behind a tree that smelled like pepper, he caught his breath. Overhead a large bird floated. Another hunter. He was just off the path now. The dogs would follow his original scent, and when The Challenger came by, he'd throw the loop over his head and strangle him.

He saw the dogs. Giant wolfhounds like old man Wetzel had kept. Three of them. They bounded past. The Challenger appeared. He was carrying a small gun. No, it was a crossbow. Like the knights in those old movies used. The thin, mustached figure crept through the open area.

Rainsford readied himself. His head throbbed and his body ached, but in a minute it would all be over. His hands tightened on the vine.

The dogs ahead stopped. The Challenger paused just in front of him. Rainsford felt better at that moment than he had when he had been voted All-Pro and given a bonus.

Suddenly the black thing appeared behind him. About eight feet tall, and hairy. It was a gorilla.

Rainsford turned. The gorilla batted him with a paw, sprawling him into the clearing.

He shook his head. Dimly he caught the image of the mustached Challenger turning toward him.

Rainsford's eye had always been able to pick up a fastball, even Gossage's at ninety-plus miles per hour, and he saw the bolt. Watched it leave the crossbow. Spied it coming toward him. Heard the air parting as the bolt hurled through space. Felt it strike his chest. Heard himself scream for the third time. Glimpsed the blood spurting from his chest.

The last thing he was conscious of was a pair of furry arms picking him up.

II

SHAYNE PEERED CAUTIOUSLY DOWN THE LONG, DARK ALLEY. The red hairs on the back of his neck bristled as the cool wind swept up the concrete passageway toward him, bringing its sounds and smells. The odor of rotting food mingled with the sulfurous scent of burned packing crates. A garbage can tumbled over, spilling out a week's worth of discarded life, and the carcass of a full-grown rat was hurtled into a stagnant pool of early evening rainstorm.

But the redhead was also conscious of something else, something waiting for him in the alley.

And he had to go in after it.

Taking his first step into the darkness, he stared straight ahead. He had been taught to catch any movement out of the corners of his steel-gray eyes. His ears strained for any sound not natural to this jungle of concrete and trash.

The night wind whipped his ruddy complexion. It had come to this as he had known it would when he had started. The vow he had taken during his recent encounter with Ho Lu had led inevitably to this, this dark corridor of death.

The big detective felt the drops of sweat forming on his meaty palms as he moved deeper into the narrow tunnel. His stomach jumped and his pulse raced.

A leather sole barely scraping across the tarmac came at him from five o'clock. Shayne heard the object slicing through the heavy air from behind him. Dropping swiftly to one knee, he spun to meet the sound.

The lunge carried the attacker right over Shayne's head. The knife caught a dim street light and for an instant gleamed silver.

Shayne jerked a right upward to the attacker's groin. Without

waiting for the resulting thud or moan, he drove his left upward like a piston into the man's exposed chin.

The detective was back on his feet before the man crashed to the tarmac. He stepped over a gutted cat, blending more and more into the darkness. His breathing was deep and long. He knew the next attack would be stronger. Just like the waves of the ocean, the deeper you went, the stronger they got.

Shayne brought up his right quickly. The stick snapped like a broom handle smashed against a steel girder. Shayne's left snapped into a similar protective position in time to stop the next blow. The big redhead crossed his arms, then snapped them outward viciously. The sound of cartilage cracking drifted into the night air.

The redhead paused to look down at his fallen opponents. One was kneeling, the other was lying there, and both were out of commission.

Without warning a force like a wrecking ball drove into Shayne's back. The big redhead reeled, coming to a stop against a concrete wall.

He gasped for breath. A high-pitched scream cut through the night. Shayne turned. The attacker seemed suspended in space above the detective's head. White, open palms shimmered against the blackness as the cat-like creature uncoiled a powerful kick at the detective's head.

Shayne snapped his head to the side and brought up his hands. The blow still caught him below the right ear. His head felt like the inside of a clanging bell as he fell sideways.

React, he told himself. Get your hands up.

Too late. An open palm came in under his chin and jerked his head back. Then a bare foot struck him just below the sternum, driving what air remained into the night.

Trying to get to his feet, the redhead slipped on a batch of spoiled produce and slipped backward.

The attacker jumped on his chest. Street light played off yellow features. His teeth gritted, his eyes determined, he drew a sai.

"Keee-iiii," screamed the assailant, plunging the three-pronged Oriental knife downward.

Out of the darkness a wooden staff flicked. Just as the sai reached Shayne's throat it was knocked away. The redhead felt his neck. A warm liquid trickled just below his larynx.

"To think is to die." said a voice from the shadows. "Do you believe the leopard thinks before it leaps? You must empty your mind. Attune yourself to the entire situation. Allow your trained survival instinct to take over, Mr. Shayne."

A strong arm hoisted him up. Shayne shook his head. A small

Oriental in blue jeans and a cut-off sweatshirt appeared and smiled. "Don't worry. You've only been working at it a month. If I had learned as much as you in such a short time, I would now be a Grand Master."

Shayne brushed the putrid garbage from his dark turtleneck. "Thank you, sensei."

"I've told you to call me Greg. We've known each other far too long for such formality."

"I appreciate you and your school putting in all this time."

"Think of it as our contribution to making our city streets a little safer."

"Not to mention alleys," said the redhead.

"Working in this real environment rather than my dojo has accelerated your training. Your natural physical abilities have made you an ideal student. Soon you will be ready."

Shayne walked over to where he had parked the Buick and got in. He felt a little more ready. Having recently encountered a ninja, an Oriental master of death, he had been forced to study the martial arts, and despite his youth Greg Chen was the best teacher in Miami.

As Shayne pulled away, his young friend called out, "Just remember, when your life is on the line, to think is to die."

SHAYNE KNOCKED ON THE SECOND-FLOOR APARTMENT door. In the background he could hear the familiar quiet music that always reminded him of the dentist's office.

The small brunette opened the door.

"Hi, Angel," he smiled.

"You're late," Lucy Hamilton said curtly.

"Well, you see . . ."

"At least I know you weren't with another woman," she said, holding her nose, "unless she was Miami's first female garbage tipper."

"Greg thought I needed some situational training."

Lucy walked away from him and turned her back. "Michael, you're taking that martial arts stuff too seriously. You've cancelled clients, refused to take cases, shut your door on your friends, and I've hardly seen you this last month."

"It's something I had to do. That fight with Ho Lu gave me a real sense of my limitations, my vulnerability."

"Speaking of limitations, Michael, there's a limit to how long you can keep a meal warm." She pointed to a table where a white candle had nearly burned itself out. "You said you'd be here two hours ago."

"I really meant to, but Greg had this whole thing set up."

"Well, I hope Greg can grill steak and onions." She opened the door. "Oh, before you leave, an old friend of yours named Diamond called to tell you she's enrolled this semester at Florida American College."

Reluctantly Shayne started out. "Maybe she has left the streets for good," he said, recalling the ex-prostitute who had promised him that because of his help she would start a new life.

"I'm glad to see," Lucy said sarcastically, "that you're still taking an interest in some of your cases."

The redhead paused in the doorway. "Lucy, I'm sorry. We really need to talk . . ."

His trim secretary picked up an envelope from a doorside table. "This came for you Special Delivery."

The redhead started to open it.

"Why don't you read it at your apartment." She slammed the door on him.

IF IT HAD BEEN ANYONE ELSE, THE DETECTIVE WOULD HAVE beat down the door. People didn't shut Mike Shayne out. But he and Lucy had always had a special relationship that grew out of mutual respect. She was right. He knew that. He had thrown himself into his training too much, but when he did anything, he did it well or not at all.

Shayne fried the Buick's tires as he pulled away from the curb. He had thought she'd understand, but yeah, a woman had needs too. When the time was right, he'd try to patch things up.

He slammed the brake to the floor as a light suddenly flashed red. Firing up a Camel, he ripped the Special Delivery letter open and held it across the steering wheel.

His eyes skimmed the page.

Just as quickly his huge hand crumpled the paper and threw the wad down on the floorboard. Of all the ridiculous proposals, this one took the cake. If this were the kind of offers he had been getting, staying away from the office made good sense.

A horn blared in his ear. The only other driver in Miami who was out at this time of night had been sitting behind him, his hand poised above a musical airhorn until the split-second the light changed.

Shayne's muscles ached, he smelled like a garbage dump, the only woman he really cared about had slammed the door in his face, a stupid letter had wasted his time, and behind him A.J. Foyt was waiting to run the 500 down Biscayne Boulevard.

Well, at least, he told himself as he hit the accelerator, things couldn't get any worse.

III

"IT'S A MIRACLE," CALLED OUT THE SCARECROW REPORTER from his booth at the back of The Beef House as Shayne walked in. "Lazarus has returned from the dead. Pat, bring some Hennessy's to warm the body."

The redhead slid into the booth across from Tim, who peered out from behind a fortress of newspapers, magazines, tip sheets, and a calculator. "Hey, Lazarus, who do you like in the Giants-Eagles game Sunday? My exhaustive research tells me the Giants ought to win, but by 3½ points? In Philly? Forecast is for a sloppy field. Hard to go against the home dog. Say something. If I don't hit it this week, Bennie the Book'll spend the entire month of January in his Bahamian retreat compliments of this humble reporter."

Shayne fired up a Camel, sucking its smoke deeply into his lungs.

"Some help you are, shamus. How about the Dolphins-Browns? Cleveland's on the up-tick, but as *Monday Night Football's* resident pundit is so fond of telling us, it's hard to go against a Shula-coached team."

"Sure and begorrah, I wouldn't, me boy," said Pat, plunking down two filled glasses. "Browns' fullback's been AWOL about a week. The smart-money boys tell me it's personal problems, but the Devil kiss the Blarney Stone if he hasn't been caught with his fingers in the candy jar — the nose-candy jar," he said with a wink.

Rourke roared his hearty Irish laugh at the departing bartender. Shayne sat impassively amidst a swirl of smoke.

"Shamus, why is it I'm starting to feel like Pat O'Brien in those old movies? Is there something the good padre can do for you, my son?"

"Can it, Tim," groused Shayne.

"I don't see or hear from you in a month. You wander in and interrupt important business and you want me to can it. Are you having trouble with some case?"

"No," admitted the redhead. "I haven't worked a case in about a month."

The reporter studied his friend deeply. "You've been working out, haven't you?"

Shayne nodded. "Still don't miss a thing, do you?"

"Aren't you the same guy who's been telling me for years that push-ups, situps, and sprints are all that are needed to stay in shape?"

Slowly Shayne explained his recent martial arts commitment, finishing with, "I'm afraid it's alienated Lucy."

Rourke called for two more Hennessy's. "It's not my place to talk about it, but you and Lucy have always had a strange relationship. You

work together, but it's more than that. Your public and private lives overlap. There has to be some strain."

"Maybe you're right. She's the best thing in my life, and lately I've been too busy to let her know, what between my training and that damned pest."

"Pest?"

Shayne pulled out a telegram. "It started with a Special Delivery letter last week. I thought it was just a prank, but every morning since I've gotten one of these at the apartment."

"What is it?"

"Read."

The reporter scanned the yellow page quickly. "What's this challenge bit? Challenge you to what?"

Shayne lit up another Camel. "Some kook claims he'll give me 50K to play a game with him."

The reporter exhaled audibly. "Fifty thousand. What kind of game?"

"That's just it. He's never bothered to tell me."

"How are you supposed to accept the challenge if you don't know who he is?"

"He's given me a number to call."

"Did you?"

"Yeah. It was an answering service. I left a message where he could stuff his telegrams."

"The guy sounds more determined than Bennie the Book on collection day."

Shayne laughed.

"What does this last line mean? 'If money won't work, perhaps a change of stakes is in order.'"

"I don't know," admitted the detective.

Rourke swirled the dark liquor. "If I were you, I'd worry more about patching things up with Lucy than some nut who's bent on driving up Western Union's stock."

THE BIG REDHEAD PAUSED BEFORE THE DOOR LABELLED MICHAEL SHAYNE, INVESTIGATIONS. It had been a long time since he had taken his beautiful secretary to lunch. Something like The Golden Cock. That white wine she liked. And if afternoon lingered into the night, so be it.

He opened the door. The outer office was empty.

"Angel," he called.

No answer.

Quickly he checked his office. Empty too. It wasn't like Lucy to leave the office when he wasn't there.

Maybe she had stepped out to the powder room. No, she was to protective to do so without locking the door.

A note. Maybe she had urgent business and had just forgotten to close up the office. He looked over his desk, then hers. Nothing. Even if her sister in Texas had been dying, she would have taken the time to leave a note. That's just the way Lucy was.

A mounting shudder shook Shayne's lanky frame. Maybe something had happened to Lucy. In his time in Miami he had made enough enemies to fill the Orange Bowl.

His trained eyes scanned the room for signs of a struggle. Everything was in place, even the magazines on the reception table.

He sat down at her desk, not liking what he was thinking. On impulse he opened the left lower drawer.

Her purse was still there.

That sealed it. Something had happened to her.

The phone on his desk rang.

As he reached for it, he noticed for the first time something foreign on her desktop. Next to the phone lay a short, metal rod with a point on it — sort of like a tent peg.

"Shayne," he said into the receiver.

"Perhaps now," said a hollow voice, "you'll give stronger consideration to my recent attempts to communicate with you."

"Who the hell is this?"

"Someone whom I trust has your attention."

Shayne's worst fear was slowly becoming reality.

"Mr. Shayne, if fifty-thousand dollars doesn't appeal to you, what do you think the life of Lucy Hamilton is worth?"

IV

THIS TIME SHAYNE DIDN'T BOTHER WITH THE BRANDY snifter. He simply grabbed the nearly empty bottle of Martell around the neck and took a long swig from it.

Damn it! Almost seven hours had passed since the phone call, and now he paced nervously across his living-room rug. "I'll be in touch," had said the voice on the telephone. How long had he shouted questions like "What do you want?" and "Where are you?" before he had realized the line was dead?

The redhead wanted to be where getting in touch was easy. That meant either his office or apartment. The caller would know where he was. The timing on the phone call had been too close to be coincidental. He had been watched, and what burned him was that he hadn't

caught the tail. He had been so preoccupied about his relationship with Lucy that he hadn't even noticed he was being followed.

"Attune yourself to the entire situation," Greg Chen had been trying to teach him. Hell, he had a lot to learn.

Lucy. She was in real danger now, and it was all his fault. Whoever had been on his tail probably hadn't known about his close relationship to her until last week when like a fool he had led the pursuer to her. Going to her apartment had been a sure sign that she was more than a secretary to him.

What was wanted from him? Why had his caller been so persistent with letters and telegrams? Why pick Mike Shayne? Why not accept a repeated "No" for an answer? What would be done to Lucy while he waited? The unanswered questions bore into him as surely as though he were lying on a bed of nails.

The phone jarred him. Its ring was as loud as a fire alarm next to his ear. He removed the receiver.

"Hello," the detective said loudly.

"No need to shout, Mr. Shayne. I would like to conduct our business as gentlemen."

"Hey, pal," said the redhead, recognizing the hollow voice he had heard earlier, "we don't have any business."

"I beg to differ."

"What's going on? Why did you hang up earlier?"

"To give you sufficient time to consider the gravity of the situation."

Shayne's Irish temper had quickly shot up to its low boiling point. When he played any game, he wanted all the cards on the table. "If you've done anything to Lucy, there's not a safe place in hell you can hide from me."

"So I was right about your relationship with Ms. Hamilton."

"How can I be sure you really have Lucy? And if you do, what do you want from me?"

"I've sent over an emissary or two to conduct you to me."

Shayne looked toward his front door just in time to see it crash inward like a falling drawbridge.

THREE LARGE HISPANICS IN WHITE LINEN SHIRTS STEPPED IN.

Ducking his head to get through the doorway, a huge man followed them in. When he stood full-length in their midst, they appeared to be dwarfs. Shayne guessed the man close to eight feet tall and nearly four-hundred pounds. He had thick black hair, furry, protruding eyebrows, and dark hair clumped on his face.

But what Shayne noticed the most dangled from the breast pocket of

the giant's tent of a suit.

The handkerchief, the handwoven, linen one he had given Lucy at the end of the Helen Hunt case.

Shayne's temper boiled over. A week's worth of frustration and anger exploded.

Without waiting for them to say or do a thing, he showed them nobody backed Mike Shayne into a corner.

A right front kick lifted the first Hispanic back and over the coffee table. The second he caught off-guard by smashing the empty Martell bottle across his face.

The third Hispanic clipped the redhead with a roundhouse right to the stomach, sending him into the couch. The white-shirted Hispanic he had kicked ran toward the detective with a chair lifted over his head. Shayne moved just before the wooden frame crashed over the couch.

The giant stood as silent and motionless as if he were a religious statue.

"Anything can be a weapon," Greg Chen had drummed into him. The redhead grabbed the large metal ashtray and hurled it toward the attacker. The circular object hit the man at the hinge of the jaw. He winced in pain and grabbed his face.

Shayne jerked the receiver loose from the telephone and wrapped the dangling wire around his wrist. It was more a Medieval mace than a nunchaka, but as he swirled it viciously, he knew it would do.

The Hispanic stood momentarily mesmerized till the black weapon glanced off his temple. He dropped as if shot.

Two down.

The remaining Hispanic staggered toward him. A glass shard protruded obscenely from where his left cheek once was. Blood dripped from the wound.

Shayne greeted him with a one-two combination, but the man kept coming, his body unwilling to give up. Something psychological was driving him.

Shayne ducked under a lazy right. He grasped the man's wrist, and like an Olympic hammer-thrower swung him around, then let go.

The window facing Twelfth Street collapsed as the Hispanic tumbled headlong through it.

Shayne didn't hear the body meet the pavement. He turned to confront the giant, who merely smiled indifferently.

"Now you will come with me." The giant's Eastern European accent was slurred, but seemed to roll out from behind his beard like wind whipping through a mountain pass.

Shayne reacted. Grabbing the phone table, he threw it. The wood

shattered across the giant's shins.

The blow seemed to do little but make the intruder mad. He stepped toward the redhead, his voice in a low growl.

Shayne waited for the exact moment, then snapped a side kick to the left kneecap. He had learned that no matter how powerful the opponent, certain areas of the body were always vulnerable.

The giant's knee buckled, and like a Black Forest oak he toppled forward.

Shayne tried to move out of the way, but the falling behemoth caught him in a bearhug. The detective could feel his hairy arms tightening about him in a snake-like coil. His ribs ached and he began gasping. In a moment he would lose consciousness — and more.

Cocking his head, Shayne snapped it forward. It travelled only inches, but the force of the blow to the bridge of the nose startled the giant. His grip relaxed.

Shayne brought his hands up. With his open palms he slapped the giant's bristle-covered ears. The sudden pressure on his inner ears brought the giant to his knees in agony.

Interlocking his fingers Shayne swung a double-fisted sledgehammer into the giant's face. His head jerked back and he crumbled to the floor.

The redhead shook himself. Looking down at the hulking figure who lay unconscious like a hibernating bear, Shayne thought to himself that the month's worth of training had been worth it.

He felt a sharp pain in the nape of his neck. Reaching back he turned to his open doorway.

A fourth Hispanic crouched in the classic marksman stance.

Just before blacking out, Shayne saw the pistol the man was holding.

V

SHAYNE WAS DRIFTING LIKE A FEATHER DOWN THROUGH the darkness. In the distance he heard the cries of exotic birds and waves slapping against rocks. The scent of lush greenery hung in the humid air.

He blinked. Light struck his eyes. He was lying on a straw bed in a narrow stone room. Rusty bars were embedded in a window about seven feet above him. As he sat up, heat overwhelmed him. The place looked to be a cell, a very old cell.

Shayne rubbed the back of his neck — it was sore and stiff. He was wearing the same polo shirt and khaki slacks he had had on when he encountered the five men. How long had he been out? He rasped his thumb across his chin — about a day's growth. From the position of the sun, he guessed it was around noon of the day after he had been

attacked.

Where was he? The redhead stood his bed on end and climbed it like a ladder. He seemed to be on a small hill overlooking a bay, which was surrounded by all sorts of lush foliage. The tropics. He could barely see, but the building that he was in was made of gray, moss-covered stone. He guessed he was imprisoned in one of the old Spanish forts that once protected the Carribean.

Nearby he heard a mechanical whine. A generator. Somebody had modernized the castle.

"Welcome to Casa Creed, Mr. Shayne."

Even before he turned, the rawboned redhead recognized the hollow voice. It belonged to a thin man with a mustache. His shortness was accentuated by the man standing next to him, the giant the detective had beaten at his apartment. The hairy man's eyes were black and puffy, and he wore a bandage across the bridge of his nose. A barred door stood between Shayne and them.

"Dr. Livingston, I presume," Shayne said sarcastically.

"It's Dr. Creed actually, but that's a rather good guess. Tell me, how do you find the accommodations?"

"Other than the view, it doesn't compare with the Fontainebleau."

"What do you expect for free? Really, Mr. Shayne, for such an imposing physical specimen, you are quite articulate. Tell me, when you defeated four excellent fighters in less than three minutes, weren't you worried that such aggressive actions might jeopardize Ms. Hamilton?"

"If you went to all the trouble to grab her to get to me, you weren't about to do anything to her just because I roughed up a couple of your boys. Besides, I wanted to send you a little message of my own."

"Message received, loud and clear."

"Now that you've got me here and gotten my attention, what do you want?"

"Wait till first light, tomorrow at breakfast, and all will be made known."

"And Lucy?"

"Alas, I'm afraid she will not be able to join us."

Shayne sprang from the bed and grabbed the cell door. Up close Dr. Creed's face was as white as the underbelly of a dead fish. Shayne shook the bars. The giant moved toward him, revenge in his eyes.

"Hans, no. Not now, you idiot." The small man slapped his companion viciously. The giant accepted the rebuke without response. "Mr. Shayne, Ms. Hamilton has not been harmed, and she will remain in that state as long as you cooperate."

The detective sat on the edge of the bed he had returned to its original position. He had to sort things out. If it were simply a matter of his own safety, he would try to break out and take his chances. But he had to think of Lucy. Where was she? What kind of trouble was she in?

ABOUT NIGHTFALL A TRAY OF FOOD WAS SLIPPED INTO HIS cell. The meal consisted of a small steak, spaghetti, honey, and orange slices. He felt as though he were sitting at the Dolphins' training table.

His meal finished, Shayne was lying in the starlight-filled room when he heard a click on the floor. Somebody had just thrown something through the cell window. He crawled around the damp rock on all fours, scooting his hands in front of him. He felt something soft and squishy, then a piece of metal. A key.

Why?

Creed had said everything would be explained in the morning. Was the good doctor toying with him? Had he an unknown friend at Casa Creed?

It didn't take him long to decide. If his number were being called, Shayne wasn't going to go sitting in a dirty cell.

The key fit and the rusty door creaked outward. The corridor was dim and musty. Which way did he go? Up or down? From the way Creed had talked, Shayne didn't think Lucy was imprisoned like himself in the castle's cellar.

The stone stairs spiraled upward and Shayne crept slowly through the darkness. He emerged in a low-ceilinged room illuminated by a single low-watt bulb.

From down the corridor to his left came rumblings. Like animals stirring in a zoo. Shayne continued cautiously toward the noise. The sounds of heavy breathing reached his ears. In the distance he heard a yip and then a bark. The light grew dimmer as he rounded a bend. His feet felt straw beneath them.

The foul stench of dung and urine assaulted his nose. Animals? What kind of place was this? A real zoo? Feet scurried across the straw. Slowly his eyes began to adjust. He seemed to be in a corridor of cells like his below.

A guttural moan rose in volume from the right. Shayne pressed his face against the cold metal bars. Something stirred in the shadows. The odor was overpowering. No matter how he strained he couldn't make out the shape, but it was an animal and it was big, as big as a human.

A hiss emerged from the cage behind him. He turned. Two close-set eyes glowed at him from across the corridor.

What kind of hellhole had he been brought to? Up had obviously been the wrong choice. There was nothing ahead of him but a stone wall. He backtracked toward the light.

When he stepped into the lit room, he was momentarily blinded. Two powerful hands reached around him and closed. They began to squeeze. He struggled to free himself, but in his weakened condition he was no match. The more he struggled, the weaker he got. Had there been something in the food?

The last thing he remembered was being tossed back into his cell.

VI

SHAYNE LOOKED DOWN AT THE SUMPTUOUS BREAKFAST that surrounded him — orange juice, scrambled eggs, bacon, toast and honey — but didn't take a bite. He was convinced he had been drugged the night before.

He was sitting at the end of a long wooden table covered with a white linen cloth. Candles flickered in a golden chandelier above a room decorated with authentic-looking Spanish furniture. Early conquistador, thought Shayne, finding it hard to believe that this room and his cell could be in the same building. Although it was still dark, he had been roused from his sleep, taken to a shower, and given a pair of jeans, sneakers, and a t-shirt to wear.

The large wooden door across the room swung open. Hans strode in, followed by a strutting Creed who was immaculately groomed and attired in a safari jacket, khaki slacks, and tall, leather boots. He reminded Shayne of the very rich going through Palm Beach's Lion Country Safari.

"Mr. Shayne," said the mustached figure, "didn't anyone ever tell you that breakfast was the most important meal of the day?"

The detective gazed at the steaming feast before him. "Sorry, but I'm a Wheaties man myself."

"I'd have thought that last night would have taught you a little more about the gravity of the situation. I provided you with a key to demonstrate the impossibility of escape." Creed waited for Hans to pull back his chair. After the small man was seated, the giant took an immobile position behind him.

"Hans isn't eating with us this morning?" Shayne said, noticing that his own table setting was minus a knife.

"Imposing specimen, isn't he?" said Creed. "I first met him at a circus in Germany where I was studying. A mere sideshow strongman, a freak. Imagine what he could have done in the NFL had he been born in East St. Louis instead of East Berlin. All that size and less than 5% body fat. His reflexes and reaction times are

incredible for one his size, and I don't have to tell you about his strength."

Shayne's aching ribs and stiff neck verified the description. "Let's cut out all the preliminary crap," the redhead grouched. "Isn't it time you told me what's going on?"

Creed pointed to a huge cabinet against the wall. Hans effortlessly wheeled it over beside Shayne and opened a door. Inside were two small televisions.

"I think," he said, "you'll like the program on Monitor #1. It stars your favorite actress."

Puzzled, Shayne looked at the screen. Instantly a picture appeared. It was Lucy. She was dressed in a simple blouse and shorts. Her hair was tied up on her head, and her eyes had the glaze of an Over-town junkie. She appeared to be in a very small room. A hut he guessed from loose-boarded walls.

"Angel," Shayne called, "are you all right?"

"You can see her, but she can not see you," Creed explained, touching a remote-control switch next to his seat. The picture faded. "As I assured you, Ms. Hamilton is presently in mint condition."

At least physically, decided the redhead. "Let's get on with it, Creed. What's my part in this little game?"

"Interesting you should use that term. I'm a very wealthy man. I bought this island, Puerto Grande, several years ago from a nearby banana republic dictator who needs my annual contributions to maintain his haven of Marxism. Consequently, I make all the rules here."

"Your own little Carribean paradise," Shayne said, recalling his earlier deduction.

"Exactly. You see, Mr. Shayne, my life has been one of seeking constant excitement. It started at various Continental gambling establishments, then progressed to formula racing. My search took me finally to Africa for the hunt. Life teetering on the brink of failure fascinates me. But alas, I confess that after bagging the Big Five and the Little Two, even hunting lost its luster. I thought I was doomed to a life of boredom — what my German colleagues call *Weltschmerz*." His delicate hand lifted the pale china to his lips. "That is, until I came up with The Challenge."

"Congratulations," said Shayne, sitting back in his chair. "I'm glad your life took on a meaningful purpose."

"If I were you, I would take The Challenge a bit more seriously than your three predecessors. Hans, the map."

The manservant shoved a piece of paper onto Shayne's empty

plate.

"Food for thought," said Creed. "We are at Point A. Ms. Hamilton is approximately five miles away at Point B on the west side of the island. The Challenge is quite simple: All you have to do is get from A to B."

"Why do I get the feeling that it's not quite that simple?" said Shayne as he memorized the topography.

"Because you are a perceptive man," said his host. "You've probably already figured out that one hour from dawn, when you start, I will begin the pursuit. Should you get to Ms. Hamilton before I get to you, I will release both of you and provide you with a \$50,000 bonus for your trouble."

"You expect me to take your word for that?"

"Sir, I am an honorable man. The word of Nickolas Creed is respected. I have thrown down the gauntlet before, and my skills have always prevailed."

"That's because you run a real fair contest," thundered Shayne, remembering the drug. Honor — it was so much bullshit. "I'm out there with only my bare hands, and you've got a hunting rifle."

"Au contraire, this is sport. Since you are not a cape buffalo, I shall carry that." He pointed to the wall.

Shayne recognized a crossbow. Of course. The metal rod on Lucy's desk had been a bolt. He knew even ancient versions of the crossbow could pierce armor.

The redhead had an idea how to cut the odds against him. "I'm sorry, Dr. Creed, but I don't like to play by another man's rules."

With all his strength he suddenly shoved the table forward. It caught Creed in the gut, forcing his chair back into Hans. As the giant toppled backward, Shayne scrambled across the set table and was on top of Creed.

Before he could throw a single punch, the heavy doors to the room swung open. Two Hispanics in white shirts popped in. Each pointed an automatic rifle at him.

"That was a foolish move," said Creed, standing up. "Mr. Shayne, I've treated you like a man, and you've acted like a beast."

"You bastard," said Shayne as the recovered giant stepped between them. "Say I go along with your stupid little game. What's to keep me from waiting up the path a little ways and ambushing you?"

"Aside from my skills in detecting you, there's one element of our contest that I've failed to divulge." He picked up the remote-control device. "Let me direct your attention to Monitor #2." He

pressed a button. "To insure you give your best performance, I've added incentive to the chase. You see, there's something else in a hurry to get to Ms. Hamilton."

The picture on the monitor wavered and then snapped into focus.

From a dark cell emerged a huge, hairy gorilla.

VII

SHAYNE FOLLOWED THE SMALL FIGURE OF CREED THROUGH the fortress, across some battlements till they came to a wall overlooking an open courtyard. In the east a small orange glow was seeping through the heavy mist. First light, thought the redhead, maybe the last he would see.

Down below, Hans strode into view. At the end of a leather leash in either hand were a trio of snarling hounds.

"What every good hunter needs. My dogs are pedigrees, bred over generations for one purpose — track and kill," said Creed, gesturing at the restless dogs. "There's a ladder at the other end of this parapet. You'd better hurry. The dogs and I will be joining you in . . . fifty-nine minutes."

SHAYNE WAS OFF AND RUNNING, FOR REASONS OF TIME and to keep his ruse from being discovered. Before starting the fight with Creed, he had known he wouldn't be able to get to the doctor. But that hadn't been his objective. The doctor's silver knife that the detective had hidden in his right sock was.

The map was firmly etched in his mind. He hadn't seen any trails on it, but even if he had, he wouldn't have taken them. A man like Creed would stack the deck in his favor, whether it was drugging the quarry or setting boobytraps ahead. Besides, trails made the dogs' work easier.

One thing he knew. For all the doctor's profession of honor, there was no way, win or lose, Creed planned to let him off the island. The only end to The Challenge was death — his or Creed's.

Just into the tropical jungle he paused to leave a message. With his dull knife he used a few precious minutes to break off a soft sapling and sharpen one end. He jammed it into the ground, its point aimed at Casa Creed. The first dog to pick up the scent and bound into the underbrush would, if he were lucky, impale itself.

The jungle was primeval. To move even a few feet took a great deal of effort, for the untouched foliage grew thick and huge. If Creed had rigged traps, they would have to be in a clearing since nobody could move in the undergrowth without leaving some sort of sign.

Shayne stepped around a large palmetto and grabbed a vine to pull it aside. The vine wriggled in his hand.

Shayne threw the long, black snake as far away from him as he could. He should have known, he told himself, that you couldn't have paradise without a few serpents.

The redhead hadn't gone over a couple of hundred yards when he came to a clearing about the size of a racquetball court. Cautiously he left the cover of the bush. He broke off another limb, and like a blindman with a cane advanced through the tall grass.

About ten feet into the clearing his stick sank quickly, pulling the detective forward. Recovering his balance just in time, Shayne found himself teetering on the edge of a grass-covered hole. Using the stick as a lever, he pried back the cover and peered in. As best he could make out, it was a ditch about twelve feet long and six feet wide. At the bottom a shaft of sunlight revealed a group of nasty-looking sharpened stakes.

Well, if Creed were playing hardball, so be it. He backtracked his own trail till he came to a fallen palm he had noticed earlier. It was about twelve feet long. Shayne picked it up and carried it to the ditch, where he threw the trunk across the gap. Satisfied it was secure, he tightroped across, using his stick for balance. Near the end he stumbled, pitched sideways, and recovered his balance. Once across, he picked up the palm trunk and threw it aside.

He doubted that Creed would fall for it, but the hounds in hot pursuit would not be so smart.

If he were lucky, he'd get another hound, maybe two. Picking off his pursuers one by one, though, was a luxury he couldn't afford. He had a momentary vision of Lucy on the ground with the gorilla standing over her. He wiped it from his mind — there were some things best not to think about.

He had to move and move quickly. Parting the brush he picked up his pace. Between the bugs and the sun he lost track of time. He heard a baying from the dogs. Then suddenly a series of short barks and a single, long howl.

One down — five to go.

THE DEATH OF ONE OF HIS PRIZE DOGS WOULD INFURIATE Creed. Which was fine with Shayne. An angry man wouldn't hunt so rationally — not that Creed seemed so rational in the first place.

Overhead, birds shrieked at him for violating their home. Damn, he thought, their sudden flights and outbursts would alert Creed to his approximate position.

His stomach ached and his legs felt rubbery. He kept calm, forcing himself to control his breathing as Greg Chen had taught him. The rawboned redhead had a sense of how the men he had pursued over the years must have felt. Some of them he knew he had caught when they panicked in a blind attempt to escape. Surely Creed counted on that. Well, he wasn't going to make Creed's job any easier. If the bastard wanted him, he'd have to come and get him.

Shayne spotted a fallen coconut. He crushed it open on the first rock he came to. He drank the warm milk, then scraped out the hard meat. It wasn't steak and onions, but it gave him the energy to keep going.

Moving on, he heard something else prowling through the brush. He stopped. It stopped behind him. He sped up. It was moving up, getting closer. Had Creed caught up to him already? He had been gone as best he could tell for a couple of hours.

Shayne made a right turn. The thing in the bushes followed. The detective grabbed a branch and hoisted himself up into a squatty tree. From his vantage point he could see the surrounding area.

Nothing.

Then as though conjured up it appeared directly beneath him. A jaguar. Wasn't the cat found in South America? If so, Creed's little paradise really was a zoo — a deadly one.

As he watched, he didn't move a muscle. He hoped the tropical breeze wouldn't shift. Jaguars were climbers. The cat cocked its head, looking around for the prey it had been stalking. A bead of sweat rolled down Shayne's forehead and trickled off the end of his nose. It splattered on a leaf above the jaguar's head. One more wrong move and he was catfood.

Then another dog appeared, larger than the first. As though catapulted it hit the rock at his feet. Its bared teeth gleamed like white icicles. Shayne knew the two wouldn't give up, but at least if he couldn't move they couldn't quite reach him. He would have some time to think of a way out.

A sudden noise above him put that rationalization to rest. A third hound stood poised on a rock ledge, its open maw so close Shayne could see the foaming saliva.

VIII

SHAYNE STARED DOWN THE THROAT OF DEATH. HIS ARMS thrust the sharpened stick upward, but the dog, a trained beast, dodged it easily. A temporary standoff, but any second the dog would leap. Even if it didn't get him directly, it would knock him off the ledge into the snarling frenzy below.

And all the while Creed was drawing closer.

"In every encounter," had said Greg Chen, "there comes a moment of crisis." Yeah, and that moment was now.

Keeping the dog at bay with his left hand, he used his right to slip off his thick leather belt. Slowly he formed a loop. With his left he kept making short thrusts, but the rabid animal inched forward. On the edge of the ledge, its balance was precarious. Pebbles showered the redhead. Below, the two beasts were still jumping.

Just as the hound above reached the point where it would have to jump or slide off the edge, Shayne withdrew the stick and swung up his leather loop.

The dog sprang.

Shayne thrust the belt forward and stepped aside. The black hound passed inches from his face as the big redhead braced for the shock.

He heard a snap as the dog's descent stopped suddenly, almost tearing his arms from their sockets. Shayne stood on the promontory like a bizarre hangman dangling his victim over the edge. The frenzied pair tore at their comrade. Shayne's muscles begged for mercy, but he held on to the writhing beast. Once the blood trickled, the dogs went berserk, their jaws ripping and slashing.

Shayne knew it could have been him.

The weight at the end of the belt went limp, and the tired redhead dropped their meal in their midst. While they were distracted, he scrambled up and over the ledge.

He knew he would only have a few minutes to get back to the pool before the dogs were on him again. But it was his only chance — and Lucy's.

THE SWEAT NOW POURING DOWN HIS BODY, THE DETECTIVE positioned himself behind a wide palm trunk. His pulse raced as he waited for the inevitable. For no reason the image of a thin, red-haired kid surrounded by friends as he sat licking a lemon ice under cotton-candy clouds shot through him.

A guttural snarl jerked him back to reality. The yawning maw surged toward him. But Shayne stopped it. The pointed stick entered the dog's body just below the throat. The hound jerked and howled hellaciously as the detective drove the spear deeper, ever deeper.

He never saw the second dog till its teeth ripped his bluejeans' rear pocket loose. Swinging the impaled dog around, he used it as a club to knock the other dog off. He backed up. A bite could mean death. He tried to pull out his spear, but it stuck. He left it, moving

backward. He needed something as a weapon. Anything. His hand searched behind him. He was at the edge of the clearing now. His hand locked on a damp root. He jerked. The rotting wood gave. He was holding a stick half the size of a billy-club — not much use for anything.

The dog came at him. "To think is to die." Instinctively he thrust the stubby knot forward. It lodged upright in the beast's open mouth.

The hound yelped in pain and surprise.

Shayne was on its back like a bull-thrower. Getting a rough hammerlock on it, he bulldogged it to the pool. Down on all fours, he inched its heaving head toward the water. The dog fought back. The redhead drew on his last reserve of strength and forced its head into the pool and beneath the algae-covered surface.

Demonically the dog struggled. The detective knew he had to hold on. Finally the creature went limp. Shayne kicked the dead weight into the pool.

At worst, Creed had but two dogs left. And somewhere lurked Hans and the gorilla.

Some odds for survival. Bennie the Book wouldn't have taken them on his best day. But Shayne was a survivor.

THE SUN'S POSITION TOLD HIM IT WAS NEAR NOON, THOUGH his muscles told him it should be dark, a time for rest.

He was back heading west. Creed surely had gained ground on him during the dogfight. The jungle seemed to be thinning out. The detective forced himself to trot as the terrain sloped thankfully downward.

He reached another clearing. Instinct told him to look back. On the ridge several hundred yards behind, a thin figure appeared holding one huge dog on a taut leash.

With a voice that belied his size, Creed yelled across the valley. "Mr. Shayne, you have done better in the experiment than I thought, but for killing my five pets you owe me a death — a slow one."

Shayne had no time for Creed's threats. He had to get to Lucy and fast.

He was now in a full run through the thin brush. He couldn't afford the luxury of caution. There couldn't be much more ground to go.

Shayne heard a noise like a giant bow snapping and felt himself being yanked upward, feet first. How stupid. He had fallen prey to one of Creed's well-placed boobytraps.

Hanging upside down about six feet off the ground, the redhead

felt helpless and disoriented. He was tired. The blood rushing downward created a sensation of heavyheadedness.

For the first time the thought of giving up appeared in his consciousness. It was Creed's game. How could you win a game where the home-field advantage was held by a madman?

No, by God, Mike Shayne was no quitter.

The redhead gritted his teeth and pulled himself into a midair situp. Reaching up he grabbed the rope and handwalked himself to where it joined the bent sapling. Quickly he pulled the lasso open and slid his legs free.

He paused for a moment at the sapling's base and then headed out again toward his objective.

No sooner had he re-entered the brush than he heard running water. A stream. Like a madman Shayne parted the curtain of green foliage and dove headlong into the pool of clear liquid. His body immersed, he drank deeply.

As the water ran westward, Shayne decided to follow the brook. It was easier to move through the shallow water, and it would confuse his pursuers. The cool fluid soothed his legs. His mind began to sort out what had been happening. Something gnawed at the redhead, telling him this whole challenge was more than a game. What was the word Creed had called from the hill?

His mind fuzzy from the lack of strength, he couldn't quite focus. Then the brush parted. He heard and smelled the ocean. At the end of the clearing was the beach and a small hut.

It seemed to be what he was looking for.

As he started to step out of the water, he felt a heavy weight upon his shoulders. It was cold and scaly and wrapping itself around him. Even without the hiss, he would have known it was a snake.

A huge constrictor.

The weight forced him to his knees. It was sliding down over his body. He steadied his breathing, keeping his chest fully expanded. He knew what these constrictors did was to wait for the victim to exhale and then tighten. He kept his breathing slow and regular, hoping the snake couldn't time his exhale.

But all he was doing was buying time.

His right hand struggled. He had to free it. Slowly he wriggled it downward till he found his pocket and the knife.

Filling his lungs deeply with air, he was woozy. The snake was tightening. He began to slash at its skin, indiscriminately ripping off chunks of its flesh.

His mind began to wander. His hand was acting as some sort

of involuntary spasm. The will, the consciousness were almost gone.

Then the snake loosened its grasp. Suddenly it dropped to the ground.

Reaching down Shayne pulled a heavy rock from the creek and smashed it down on the snake's skull. And then again. And again.

Sometime later he dragged his body across the sand and propped himself up against a palm. So near, so far. "Lucy," he called.

No answer.

"Angel."

Silence.

It looked like a fisherman's shack long ago abandoned. He couldn't wait for Lucy's embrace. He staggered toward it, and his aching fingers pried open the door.

Taking up almost the entire hut was the hulking gorilla.

IX

HAD THE GORILLA BEEN A TEN-YEAR-OLD GIRL, SHAYNE, IN his weakened condition, couldn't have fended it off. The hairy arms reached out and grabbed him under the armpits. The redhead could smell the stench of the eight-foot monster as it picked him up. He was spun around once and flung through the air. His body offered no resistance.

Like an errant toy, he smashed into the woven wooden wall. When the crack came, he thought at first it was his ribs, not the wooden slats.

Watching the animated beast, its arms flailing wildly, Shayne could only lie there on the sand floor. Funny, he had always thought that when he checked out, his bill would be stamped in some back alley off Biscayne Boulevard.

And Lucy? What had been done to his Angel in this hellish paradise? The drooling beast lumbered toward him. The detective's sweat-drenched eyes were burning, and he could barely make out the massive form. It bent over, shook its head, then turned and loped out the door.

Why? Right then Shayne could have cared less. He wiped his eyes and got to his feet. He staggered back to the brook. The cool water surrounded him, momentarily making him forget his condition.

"Attune yourself to the entire situation." No Creed, no dogs, no gorilla, no Lucy.

Creed had been so close to him and then just vanished. Something was wrong.

Shayne went back to the hut. The only evidence of visitors was his footsteps and the gorilla's prints. It hadn't rained since he got to the island, so if someone had been here recently, there should have

been signs.

Shayne scanned the walls, the sand floor — nothing.

Then where was Lucy when he had seen her on the monitor that morning? There was only one other habitation that he knew of on the island. Casa Creed.

He had to get back there. But not the way he had come. Maybe that's why Creed had stopped on the hill, knowing that if the ape failed to finish him, the detective would have to retrace his steps. Simple — all Creed would have to do was wait.

But Shayne wasn't about to make it easy for his host. There was a way back the doctor probably hadn't figured on.

THE WARM SAND BENEATH HIS FEET FELT GOOD. SHAYNE jogged where the water had hardened the sand for firm footing, just above the highest point of the waves hitting the beach. If you can't ram it up the gut, Shula always said, take it wide!

His aching body throbbed with each step, but the thought of what Creed had done to him and that Lucy might be alive in Casa Creed spurred him on. There had been moments during his rigorous training he had hated and moments of self-doubt afterwards, but the physical regimen he had subjected his body to was now paying off in spades.

Experiment. The word that Creed had used came to him suddenly. What did the madman mean? If only the redhead had time to rest and pull things together, but right now he had to keep going. He had five more miles of beach to piece together his suspicions.

THE WINDOW ON THE BAYSIDE, WHICH HAD BEEN TOTALLY restored, opened easily. Shayne knew he wasn't expected quite yet. By the late afternoon light he could see he was in a library of some sort. Books lined the walls, and a huge oak desk was covered with bound papers. He picked up a few which had been authored by Creed. "Stress Factors in Marathon Runners." "Anabolic Steroids." "Enzyme Secretions." "Some Aspects of Negative Electrical Reinforcement."

The pieces were clicking into place. Experiment, sure. No wonder Creed had been knowledgeable about body fat and reaction times.

A horrible thought crossed the redhead's mind, but it was cut short by two voices in the hallway. Shayne crept to the open door.

"You, lummo," shouted Creed. "Can't I trust you with anything." A loud slap echoed through the fortress. "You're not hurt — your kind can't be. I'll take care of things as I always have to. If my cal-

culations are correct, a tired Mr. Shayne ought to be emerging from that jungle in another hour or two. That should give even you time to prepare a suitable welcome."

As soon as both men disappeared, Shayne knew he had to check something out. If he were right, Lucy wasn't in as much immediate danger as he had thought.

It didn't take the big detective long to find the door leading to the passageways beneath the fortress proper. Taking a flashlight from a rack on the wall, he entered the darkness. The familiar stench accosted him as he worked his way down the dimly-lit corridor where he had seen the cells the night before.

He heard the straw crack beneath his feet as he approached the first cell. Before he could bring the light up to the window, a guttural voice rasped something that sounded like "Help me."

Shayne's stomach soured as he raised the flashlight. He had read the evidence right. Hunkering in the corner on top of the dung-covered straw was a man — or at least what was left of him. Hair was all that covered his body, and his eyes had the vacant look of a docile housepet.

"Hard to believe," came the hollow voice from behind Shayne, "that that thing was once the All-star centerfielder for the Boston Red Sox."

X

SHAYNE FELT SICK — LESS AT WHAT WAS COWERING IN THE cage than at the insensitivity, the very inhumanity of Nickolas Creed.

The smiling madman brandished a Luger. "How do you like my pet? Rainsford, I believe he was once called. Let me introduce you to the rest of my menagerie. Blink your light twice at the cell across the corridor."

Reluctantly the redhead responded. With the second flash two skeletal hands grabbed the cell door and a tongue shot out.

"It expects to be fed, Mr. Shayne," Creed chuckled. "You wouldn't want to interrupt several months of conditioning, would you?"

Shayne stepped toward the tiny man.

"I wouldn't do that," said Creed. "I'm even more proficient with this than with the crossbow."

"Why?" said Shayne.

"I'd show you the third guest, but we had a little accident during a training session. That imbecile Hans, whom I suspect from his actions has developed a strong affection for you and your abilities, set the transformer incorrectly. Now, why don't we go upstairs. It's so much more pleasant."

Creed kept his distance as the redhead waited for the opportunity

to strike somewhere on the stairway.

"You're the strongest-willed specimen so far. That's what I expected, though, when I extended my experiment beyond the parameters of sport. My preliminary data indicated that you had superior mental toughness. Then again, recent studies have suggested that superior athletes possess only average I.Q.'s. What I am most astounded at is your physical prowess. Oh, perhaps I should explain that I am a trained sports psychologist."

"Wrong, pal. To me you're nothing but scum. I can't understand how anyone, especially a doctor, could do that to a fellow human being." Shayne wondered if any of that story Creed had told him about hunting, car racing, and boredom were true.

Creed led him back to the library and hit a switch. "Let there be light," said the host. "It's people like you who have tried to fetter science with a misdirected sense of morality. Remember the American hue and cry after the '76 Olympics in Munich that the Eastern Bloc countries had achieved sports superiority."

"So you crossed the Iron Curtain."

"Only to learn their secrets. Besides, great men have always been above petty politics. Unbound by conventional scruples, Iron Curtain scientists have experimented freely with training methods."

"So did the Nazis, pal."

"Exactly. And if they had been able to continue their work, who knows what wondrous athletes they could have produced."

Shayne could see from Creed's glassy gaze that he, like his island, was totally isolated from the real world. "You call what you did to those men downstairs making them better athletes?"

"They are still in the embryonic stage of my experiments. All developmental systems, whether it's the American Army or consciousness-raising groups, begin by tearing down the individual's old self. Then they rebuild the way they wish. I have borrowed the best of techniques. The whole purpose of The Challenge is to physically and psychologically destroy my specimen. A baseball star, a boxer, an all-pro football player — their humanity gone, they revert to beasts."

Shayne still felt queasy when he thought of the cages and what lived in them.

Creed moved to the open window and motioned Shayne to a black leather chair in the middle of the room. "Mr. Shayne, what am I going to do with you? Even as we speak, my men are gathering another specimen for me in Hartford. I'm afraid he will demand my full attention."

"Where's Lucy?"

"Locked in an upstairs bedroom. Unlike you, Ms. Hamilton presents a myriad of possibilities. Given the right amount of time and effort, think what I can train her to do." Creed laughed almost demonically.

"You bastard," said Shayne, leaping up from the chair.

Seemingly without effort Creed fired the Luger. The bullet grazed the redhead's left earlobe. "Your expression is priceless, Mr. Shayne, but you ought to see the face of a man who's been tracked down and shot with a deadly crossbow. Of course, what I've really done is to inject my challenge victims with a special tranquilizer. A man of your perception and prowess can appreciate the beauty of it perfectly. I bring in the best athletes the United States has to offer, I subject them to the world's best training methods. From the Americans I have borrowed the best physical techniques. From the Soviets I take their process of individual psychological motivation, and from the Chinese I have borrowed — and bettered I might add — their recent advances in the injection of animal enzymes. One of my specimens shall be my masterpiece presented at this year's International Conference on Sport."

"Do you mind if I hold my applause?" said the reseated redhead.

"You laugh, but my colleagues will cheer when they see me exhibit what I have torn down and remade in my image."

"One question," spat out the angered detective; "will you rest on the seventh day?"

"Enough of this patter," declared Creed, who was silhouetted against the sunset. "I must ready myself for my next arrival."

He lifted the Luger. "You already know this pistol contains a permanent tranquilizer. And since you are no longer useful, I say farewell. You have lost The Challenge."

THE ODDS AGAINST HIM WERE GREATER THAN THEY HAD been at any time that day, but Shayne wasn't going to go out sitting. He gripped the chair as the madman slowly sighted down the Luger.

A scraping sound from outside came through the window. Creed turned ever so slightly, but it was enough. Shayne sprang toward him. The Luger spat fire. The redhead rolled inches under it and into Creed's legs. The small man tumbled forward.

Shayne had never enjoyed hitting a man more. His left, carrying the force of a day's worth of righteous indignation, crashed into the pale and fragile jaw. The surprised look on Creed's face was one of a man who had never before been struck.

Shayne picked him up and threw him backward. He sprawled into the window ledge and collapsed. The redhead searched for the Luger.

"When you find it, go ahead and shoot me, Mr. Shayne. At least then I'll have triumphed over your outdated sense of morality."

Shayne's finger itched. The world would be better off with one less madman who thought he was God, but could he do it in cold blood?

The decision was made for him.

A hairy hand rose behind Creed, and like a giant striking snake grabbed the defeated doctor's throat. Before Shayne could do anything Creed was jerked out the window.

Shayne heard a scream and a half-human growl. Then silence.

Shayne went to the window and looked down. In the dying light he saw Creed impaled on the sharp rocks where the breakers met the fortress.

Next to Creed lay the twisted body of a gorilla, confirming what Shayne had surmised from the similar size of Hans and the beast, the gorilla's not having killed him, and the obvious videotape of the gorilla while Hans stood watching. Its hairy mask had been ripped loose by a crag, revealing the distorted features of Creed's first experiment, Hans.

The creation had destroyed its creator.

THE AX TOOK OUT THE OAK BEDROOM DOOR IN THREE blows.

While he waited for the hot coffee to revive Lucy from her drug-induced sleep, he used Creed's two-way radio to contact the U.S. authorities. He was promised a seaplane and some medical attention for the athletes below first thing in the morning.

Slowly Lucy awoke. In her white, silk gown his secretary had never looked lovelier to Shayne. He sat on the edge of the canopied bed, talking her back to reality.

"Oh, Michael, I knew you would come."

"Had to, Angel. I've been neglecting you too much lately."

She gave that special smile that was reserved for him alone. "What are we going to do till morning, Michael?" she asked.

"Well," he said seriously, "I thought maybe we could take a tour of the island. We could pack a few sandwiches, and —"

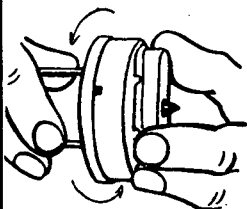
"Michael Shayne," Lucy Hamilton said with a pout, "shut up and kiss me."

Shayne grinned, shut up, and kissed her.

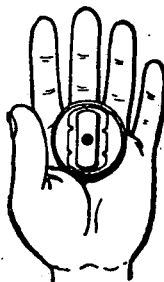
from THE CRIME FIGHTER'S CATALOG

Joy Buzzer

Every private detective should own a joy buzzer. The drawings show only a small number of the potential uses for this amazing instrument. Think of how startled a villain will be if the joy buzzer is placed against some ticklish part of his body! Think of the consternation a ninja would feel if the unit is shoved up his nostril! Many a bad guy can be frozen into immobility thinking the buzzing device is a rattler getting ready to strike! Perhaps you can find uses of your own for this remarkable piece of machinery that belongs in every crime fighters bag of tricks!



Use the ring as a key to wind it.



Wear it as a ring — the Buzzer in the palm.



It "shocks" them when they shake hands.



It makes them jump if they are ticklish.



They will hit the ceiling if they sit on it.



Under a sheet it feels like a mouse.

Irene White was dead. There was no doubt of that. Her agent, Arthur Stein, had seen her buried. Yet somehow, she was still sending him manuscripts — as though she were still writing, this time from beyond the grave!

GHOST WRITER

by J.W. STERNQUIST

THE CONCLUDING CHAPTERS TO HER LAST WORK WERE nearing completion when Irene White died. Arthur Stein, after hearing the disastrous news, fell into a terrible bout of depression. This was to have been the crowning glory in Ms. White's literary career, and would have also culminated the largest payday Stein had ever received as an agent. In the days following her death, there seemed little hope of recapturing the contract he had negotiated with her publishers. "What good is a book without the ending," Stein would say to those willing to listen to his tale of woe. "Especially a mystery," he would add despondently in summary to his unfortunate twist of fate.

Throughout the writing of her last novel, Stein had been unable to convince the stubborn, eccentric, genius writer to forward him the unedited versions of the last chapters. She had said it was against her principles to relay to anyone, even Stein, the details of her final and most laborious work. Her decision, although noble, was the crux to Stein's demise. He knew that without the finale, her book was destined for the rejection shelves of E. Barker & Sons Publishing, and, more importantly, that his agency was doomed to bankruptcy.

It seemed unlikely, even though Ms. White was the most popular living mystery writer in the world, that the publishing house would accept an incomplete manuscript. And there was nothing Stein could do to prevent this drastic action. With competition so rampant, he doubted if E. Barker & Sons would risk trying to complete one of Irene's works via a ghost writer. The idea was much too nebulous for the new breed of Harvard educated publishers. The risk/reward ratios just wouldn't fit into their long range forecasts of profit.

SO STEIN, FORCED TO TRY AND FORGET HIS LIFELONG DREAM of being the agent representing the best seller of the decade, was bitter at first; bitter enough to think about removing himself from the publishing scene. But, after days of thought, this idea proved too revolting. He loved books and people and writers too much to allow Irene's untimely death to destroy his career.

But even following a two week vacation, sodden with spirits to drown the sorrows he harbored inside, Stein found it difficult to climb the two floors of steps necessary to reach his inoffensive office in midtown Manhattan. "Not much to look forward to," muttered Stein as he shoved the key into the lock. Frowning, he stared at the logo painted on the frosted glass of the door — Arthur Stein Literary Agency. "What a joke," he grumbled, shoving the door open. Musty smells of fourteen unvented days greeted him. "What a damn joke."

Fifteen years after starting into the business as a first reader at a notable publishing house, then as an associate agent at a well known literary agency, Stein had gathered enough courage to brave the world of publishing and start his own agency. It had been a big step to take, but he had never regretted the decision — until now, that is.

Walking behind his desk, Stein glanced at the list of books he had passed over as a first reader. Many of those listed had later become huge successes to the author, agent, and publisher. "We all have our faults," he said while plugging in the coffee maker. "Why the hell did I keep that list?"

But deep down, he knew why he had kept the list; it was to remind him that adequate time must be given to all unsolicited manuscripts that pass across his desk; after all, Irene White's first book had come to him that way.

"Irene," said Stein out loud. "You were the best writer I ever knew."

Fourteen book successes and over one million in sales had kept

Stein's agency afloat. But she was gone now, and Stein would have to find someone to take her place if he was to remain in business. He had put all his efforts into expanding Ms. White's career, while — unfortunately — pushing many of his promising writers out of the picture. That had been a mistake, but, then again, Stein was famous for committing such errors.

Finding new talent, he knew, would be a formidable task. Little potential rested in the pile of slush he received each week from hopeful writers. It would be an uphill battle, and, that fact alone, almost pushed Stein back into the valley of depression he had just managed to climb out of during the past two weeks.

"Good morning, Arthur."

THE UNEXPECTED VOICE SO STARTLED STEIN THAT HE spilled the entire two pound can of coffee onto the floor. He turned toward the face of his postmaster and good friend Bert Quincey.

"I didn't mean to scare ya, Art," said the man moving toward Stein. "Let me help ya clean up that mess."

Taking a deep breath, Stein moved to one side and let Quincey broom the coffee into the dust pan. He didn't realize he had been that much on edge.

"Been on vacation or somethin', Art?"

Stein smiled; he liked Bert Quincey. "Went to Boston to visit my sister." He pointed to the trash can on the far side of the room. "Thanks, Bert. You know you didn't have to clean up after my blunder."

"Oh, it was my fault, Art. I shouldn't have snuck up on ya like that."

Stein watched as the man poured his five dollar and sixty-nine cents of coffee into the basket. That triggered thoughts of lease payments and phone bills and electric . . . Letting out a sigh, he said, "What's on your mind, Bert?"

"Well, I seen you walk past my apartment this morning and thought I should drop off all the mail I've been collecting for ya the last couple of weeks." He paused, rubbing the side of his face. "Ya know, Art, ya should let me know when you're goin' to be out of town."

"I forgot, Bert. Had a lot on my mind."

"Well, I've been keepin' your mail at my house. I don't trust them people too much down at the main office." A toothy smile, then, "I saved yours separate because I knew ya get important stuff."

"I appreciate that, Bert. Would you like some coffee . . . Stein

stopped. "I could run out and get . . ."

"Don't bother, Art. I got to get to work anyways. Just stopped by to give ya your mail." He handed Stein two shopping bags. "Best thing I could find to hold it all in."

"Thanks, Bert. Thanks for thinking about me."

The man started out the door, then popped his head back inside the room. "Could ya keep the bags for me, Art. Wife likes to use them when she goes to the A&P . . . for groceries, ya know."

"Sure thing," said Stein smiling. "Thanks again."

AFTER TOSSING THE HEAVY BAGS ONTO HIS DESK, STEIN walked across the room, turned on the radio, and listened to the weather report. A quick glance outside confirmed that it had started to rain. Spring was coming to New York. Stein hated spring; it reminded him of the time he had lived in an unheated flat in south Queens. Those were the first few years of his agency, and the same years when Marcia had divorced him for what she called, "bigger and better things." Frowning, he wondered what had happened to her.

Returning to the desk, he began to sort through the pile of multi-colored envelopes and boxed manuscripts. Tossing unknown names into one pile, and those he knew into another, Stein suddenly felt fortunate that people, unknown to him or not, would trust his expertise in the publishing arena to offer him a first look at their hours of labor. Those unknown people and their unknown words forced Stein to restructure his thinking about Irene's death, afterall, he thought, there might be a Hemingway or Steinbeck hidden somewhere inside this pile of paper and words.

"Or even another Irene White," he whispered.

Pushing aside a large envelope, Stein felt a flutter race through his body. Half hidden among the pile of remaining envelopes, he spotted a green package. It was the same type of wrapping paper Irene had used to cover her manuscripts. A sad rush rippled through Stein's thoughts as he remembered Irene. The grand, old lady had been more than just another writer to him; she had also been a good friend.

Slowly, immersed in fantasies that the box might be from Irene, Stein turned the package over to reveal the writer's name whose taste in packaging reflected those of Ms. White's. And when he saw the White seal affixed to the package, Stein gasped for a very elusive breath of air and, reaching back with his free hand, found a chair to deposit his now limp muscles into.

"It can't be," he muttered while clumsily tearing at the paper. But it was.

I'M NOT GOING TO BE ABLE TO PULL THIS OFF, THOUGHT Stein as he boarded the bus that would deliver him near the address of E. Barker & Sons Publishing. Just that morning he had made an appointment to lunch with Paul Dailey, fiction editor for the large house. "You're crazy to even try," he whispered while clutching the leather briefcase Marcia had given him to his chest. (The briefcase was the only thing Stein had retained from his former marriage. Marcia took everything else.)

Once aboard the bus, Stein squeezed into a seat occupied by an extremely fat woman in a brown, cloth overcoat, a woman quite capable of covering the entire seat by herself. "Excuse me, please," said Stein to the face scowling back at him.

The woman, obviously upset by Stein's intrusion, shoved her bulging buttock against his side in an effort to persuade him to find another seat. But Stein, engrossed in thought about his upcoming meeting with Dailey, was too nervous to care or even take notice of the apparent dilemma he had created for the woman. Unconsciously, he pushed back at her smothering antics, which, immediately, produced a verbal reprisal.

"If ya don't mind, fella, I'd like to have some more room here," she bellowed in a frown of fat and too much make-up.

"I'm sorry." Stein moved over and straddled the seat, putting one leg into the aisle. Lost in thoughts of deceit and persuasion, Stein didn't understand why she was so upset. In his preparation to wage mental combat with Dailey, the woman was just another inconvenience to his concentration.

It has to work, thought Stein. But, realistically, he knew the chances were slim that it would. Removing the letter he had received from Irene the day before, Stein read the words again for what must have been the hundredth time in the last twelve hours:

13 March

Dear Arthur,

Apologies — apologies — apologies! I seem to be always giving you apologies, Arthur, but at least the enclosed chapters should help placate

your fears that the manuscript would never be completed. One more chapter — the final chapter — will be in your hands shortly. And believe me, the ending will be worth the wait. I can still get excited whenever I think about the ending. Even after going over the idea a thousand times in my head, I bubble when I think of it. A curious idiosyncrasy of writers, I guess.

I understand the anxiety you must be going through, but I assure you the final chapter, and the galley proofs, will be completed before the end of the month. It will be nice to get the matter off my chest, even after my ending, if you know what I mean.

Hope things go well for both of us when you meet with Dailey. And don't let that old black-mailer push you around. I hear he can be a bearer of ill fortune. Get the best price you can for our work.

Well, got to get back to the keys if I hope to finish this thing. You know, Arthur, this book could be the death of me yet. It's been a hard write.

*Best wishes,
Irene*

Stein shoved the letter inside his briefcase, and, in the process, caught his frowning reflection in the briefcase's clasp. There would be no final chapter, he thought, fighting back tears that swelled to his eyes. Irene had died on the 14th of March, the day after writing him her last letter.

"How could you, Irene," whispered Stein to his reflection in the shiny metal. "And why did you insist that I sell the book to Dailey." He knew he could have gotten a better contract from another house. "If only we had . . ." (But, then, death has a way of ending dreams, doesn't it, Arthur Stein?)

IT WAS RAINING — A VIRTUAL DOWNPOUR — AS STEIN GOT off the bus and, holding his briefcase above his head to shield himself

from the rain, trotted toward the entrance of E. Barker & Sons a block away. Stein considered himself a traditional New Yorker, but today, in his heightened state of desperation, he had broken the first commandment of the big apple: Thou shalt always carry an umbrella in the fall and spring, or thou shalt experience the wrath of the Lord.

Stein, soaking in the Lord's wrath, spun through the revolving doors leading into the Publisher's main lobby, and, in the process, careened into a man who, despite the principle of inertia, didn't falter one inch from Stein's propelling mass, and, thereby, sent Stein sprawling head first across the wet floor. In the confusion of his unplanned flight, Stein's briefcase was forced open, whirling its contents throughout the lobby.

A few seconds later, stunned Stein was helped to his feet by the man who had been responsible for his gymnast antics. "You, ok?" came the words from a face looking down at him.

"Ya . . . ya, I think so," said Stein as he was lifted to his feet. "I'm . . . I'm sorry about . . ."

"Just so you're ok, Mister. You took a pretty heavy fall there."

Stein looked around; he was dizzy. Several people had gathered in a half arc around him, staring and murmuring words he was unable to hear. Others, bending and stooping, were retrieving the papers that had been ripped from his briefcase. "I'm ok," said Stein, feeling a lump rise on the back of his head. "Thank you . . . I'm ok." The man removed his hand from Stein's shoulder. "Really . . . I'm ok."

"Here are your glasses," said a woman's voice.

Stein reached out and put the frames onto his face, discovering that one of the lenses had been broken in the collision. Other hands were now shoving pages toward him. Stein pushed the sheets of wet and wrinkled paper inside his briefcase saying, "thank you . . . thank you . . . thank you" to all those who had assisted him. He repeated the phrase until the last sheets had been returned, and he was left alone in the center of the lobby to slap the dirt off his trousers and topcoat. When he found streaked mud and a rip in the side of his coat and on one knee, Stein realized that his glasses were not the only casualty of his ill-fated crash.

"I'm not going to impress Dailey on my appearance," snarled Stein as he walked toward the receptionist who, through hands covering a smiling face, asked if he was all right.

"I'm fine," said Stein, feeling a flush of hotness rise to his cheeks. He just then realized how comical he must have looked flying across

the lobby and then sliding along on the wet floor. "I sort of feel like Dagwood." Stein broke a smile; he thought the comparison might ease his embarrassment and that of the receptionist who continued to hide her grinning face behind a masking set of hands.

"Dagwood?"

"Ya, like on Blondie, you know, when Dagwood slams into the postman as he . . . " Slowly shaking his head back and forth, Stein mouthed in cadence with the shaking, "You . . . don't . . . know . . . what . . . I'm . . . talking . . . about . . . do . . . you?"

"I'm sorry, Sir," she giggled, "but I don't understand . . . " Her face, attempting to hold back a growing smile, burst into laughter. "I'm sor . . . sorry. Cou . . . could I help you with something?"

Stein, wanting to get away from her laughter, quickly said, "I'm here to see Mr. Dailey."

"Mr. Dailey . . . yes, Sir. Could I have your name?"

"Arthur Stein."

"Please have a seat, Mr. Stein," she said, motioning him toward several chairs on the far side of the room. "I'll page Mr. Dailey right away."

Moving one of the chairs in front of a small table, Stein commenced to sort through the mess of papers that had been haphazardly shoved inside his briefcase. Pulling out one soiled sheet of manuscript page at a time, he laid them on the table, hoping that all the sheets were there and not floating around somewhere inside the building.

Stein had to squint when he tried to read the page numbers, or close one eye and inspect them at close range. The lens broken in the collision was the one that corrected his weak eye. So, there he sat, squinting and blinking when Paul Dailey found him. Caught up in his desire to sort through the more than sixty pages of type and forty pages of galley proofs, Stein didn't notice Dailey approach or hear him introduce himself.

"I said it's good to meet you, Mr. Stein!" voiced Dailey for the second time.

Stein looked up, shut his left eye to see who was talking to him, then quickly jumped to his feet when he realized it must be Paul Dailey, and, thereby, dumped the just collated manuscript pages into a pile at his feet. Stein wasn't sure whether to shake the outstretched hand of Dailey, or dive into the pages of manuscript that were moving across the floor, being lifted into the air by a breeze that had suddenly come up from nowhere.

"How do you do," said Stein, grabbing Dailey's hand, then moving toward the sheets of paper as they blew across the tiled floor. "Jesus Christ. What next?" Stein muttered as the papers were gathered for a second time off the floor of the publisher's lobby.

Minutes later, when once again the sheets of now stained and marred manuscript pages and proof galleys were safely tucked into his briefcase, Stein turned his attention toward the editor who, standing with his hands folded across his chest, looked down into Stein's reddening face. "Sorry," was all Stein could utter from his dry throat. He could never, in his wildest imagination, have pondered up more of a debacled first impression than had just happened to him with Dailey.

Lunch has to go better, thought Stein, following Dailey's long stride to a restaurant across the street from the publishing house.

BUT LUNCH, TOO, PROVED TO BE A DISASTER. WHEN STEIN wanted to talk about the delivery of the final chapter, Dailey wanted to resolve some minor detail in the contract his firm had made with Irene concerning royalties. And when Stein moved to discuss the royalties, Dailey started complaining about the galley proofs he had sent to Irene and wanted to know when they would be returned for editing.

With Stein constantly blinking to try and interpret Dailey's facial expressions, and with Dailey downing martini after martini, they settled on one agreement after an hour of noncommunication — they would meet again in two weeks to exchange the final chapters and galley proofs.

Stein had pressed for more time, but Dailey, feeling the bravery of six martinis, insisted the contract stipulated that the final chapters and proofs were to be returned to the publisher no later than the end of the month. After a weak and blinking argument, Stein agreed that they would be in Dailey's hands by the end of the month. How he was going to accomplish that miracle, Stein did not know.

Soiled and squinting, with a raging headache, Stein sloshed through the heavy rain toward the bus stop. His plan to acquire more time in hopes of finding a writer who could finish the final chapter and coauthor the book had failed. But Stein had no one to blame but himself. He had sealed his own fate when he had blurted out early in their conversation that he already possessed the final chapter, and wanted to renegotiate the delivery time and royalty payouts. But Dailey had refuted both ideas, saying he would consider a lawsuit if Stein didn't live up to his side of the contract.

So, that left Stein with only one option open; an option he didn't like one bit.

THE DAY AFTER HIS MEETING WITH DAILEY, STEIN, IN A bout of futility, tried to finish the book himself. He didn't like ghost writers but his current predicament required that he had to complete Irene's work without anyone, especially Dailey, suspecting that it had not been written by her own hand. He had read so much of Irene's work over the past few years, he concluded it wouldn't be too difficult to complete the fifty or sixty pages by himself.

In the eight frustrating hours he spent curled over his Royal Electric, Stein grew to appreciate the talents of a gifted writer; his words had come together like spicy spaghetti and a hot fudge malt — grammar perfect garbage.

"I'm no ghost writer," muttered Stein, paging through sheets of the third ending he had written to Irene's book. "If Dailey only knew how ironic the term ghost writer will be for this book." Stein tossed the pages onto his desk. "This isn't Irene's style."

Stein was wallowing in his revived depression when Bert Quincey walked into the office carrying a handful of letters and packages. "Ya got a bunch of mail today, Art. Where ya want me to set 'em."

"On the table over there will be fine," said Stein, watching the man shuffle across the floor. "Want a cup of coffee or tea?"

"No, thank ya, Art. Got a lot of packages to deliver today." Quincey started out the door. "By the way, do ya still have them shoppin' bags I gave ya a couple of days ago?"

"Oh, yes, I forgot. They're over in the corner next to the desk." Stein retrieved the bags and handed them to the postman. "Thanks again, Bert."

"No problem. See ya tomorrow."

"Right," said Stein, waving after the departing figure, while moving toward the large pile of mail. A green package immediately caught his eye. "This can't be happening," he said, tearing through the seal Irene always affixed to all her correspondence.

28 March

Dear Arthur,

Enclosed are the last seventy pages of the manuscript. I hope you enjoy them.

Call after you have had a chance to review them.

Best Regards,

Irene

Stein's hands were shaking as he read the first pages. It was definitely Irene's writing. There was no doubt about that. The final chapter to her book, along with the galleys that Dailey was expecting, were inside the package. He was so excited that he didn't sit down until he had read sixty-six pages of the final chapter. The story was moving toward a more devastating and wonderful conclusion than he had ever suspected. His heart was thumping as he read the last line . . .

BUT IT WASN'T COMPLETE. FOUR PAGES WERE MISSING! THE four pages that would draw the book to a close, and deliver the final punch to a most satisfying plot. "Where are they!" yelled Stein, searching the floor for the missing pages.

Shoving everything from off the top of his desk, he searched to see if he had dropped the last pages during his exhilaration at finding the package. But the four pages were nowhere to be found; four pages that a ghost writer could never write. Stein knew the plot was too complex for a standard ending. Irene had set the storyline up so perfectly that there was only one ending — her ending. No other conclusion would fit. Stein laughed. Satisfying and unexpected endings is why Irene had become the best mystery writer in America; no one had ever been able to penetrate her labyrinth of clues and predict the outcome. She had been one of a kind.

In a moment of anger, Stein tossed the manuscript carelessly on his desk, scattering several of the pages onto the floor. There was no doubt that this manuscript was Irene's writing and that she had finished the work the day she had written him her last letter. Stein began to pace the floor. One of her relatives must have found the work and sent it to him after the burial, he thought. He met them all at the church during Irene's review and, knowing that he was her agent, naturally they would send the work to him when they found it.

Rushing to his file drawer, Stein searched for the phone number Irene's brother had given him at the funeral. Ben White would know, if anyone would, who had sent the manuscript, thought Stein. And whoever had packaged the chapter could show him where they had

found the last remaining pages of her novel, and that could lead him to the missing pages.

After several harried seconds, Stein found the number, and placed the call to upstate New York. Six rings and then the sound of a man's voice came on the noisy line. "Mr. White, this is Arthur Stein. I'm Irene's agent. We met the other day at the funeral."

"Who?"

"Arthur Stein!" said Stein louder. "I was Irene's agent. We met the other day at the funeral."

"Oh, yes, Mr. Stein. What can I do for you?"

"I just received a package with the final chapter from Irene's last book. I was wondering if you could tell me who mailed it."

"I don't understand what you're saying."

"I received the last chapter from Irene's book. Someone from Plattsburgh sent me the package and I'd like to find out who that person was."

"I wouldn't have the slightest idea who sent you that package, Mr. Stein. I've been handling all of Irene's affairs since her death."

Stein paused. "Who went through her office after the funeral?"

"You mean the cottage?"

"Cottage?"

"Yes, Irene had her office inside a cottage next to the lake. You mean you never visited her there?"

"No, I never did."

"Well, after the funeral the entire contents of the cottage, her office, was moved to the vault like she had requested in her will."

"You mean you put her office into the vault?"

"That's right. Irene wanted it that way. Might seem a little peculiar to you, but Irene's whole life was wrapped up in her work. It was a simple enough request."

Stein knew perfectly well the eccentric attributes of Irene White. The idea of being buried inside her office was not too unusual for her. "So you can't imagine who might have sent me that package?"

"No, I can't, but maybe it was just misplaced at the post office and delivered late. Happens you know."

"Are there any of Irene's things left outside the vault?"

"I don't understand what you're driving at?"

"The last four pages of the book are missing. Could you please look through her things and see if you could find them for me? It's very important."

"The last four pages did you say?"

"Yes, pages sixty-seven through seventy."

"I'll see what I can do, Mr. Stein, but I don't remember seeing any loose pages of manuscript laying around anywhere."

"Well, I would appreciate if you took another look, Mr. White."

"I . . . does this mean that her book can't be published?"

"I'm afraid it does. I need those pages to complete the contract."

"Can't someone, I mean, isn't there a way someone could write the conclusion without having those last pages?"

Stein paused. "It's possible, but not promising."

As the man continued to probe him about the how's and if's necessary to publish the incomplete novel, Stein felt uncomfortable. Irene's brother was asking too many questions about money. He was about to interrupt when White abruptly ended their conversation.

"I'll see what I can do, Mr. Stein. Call me back tomorrow."

"I will, Mr. White. Thanks . . ." White hung up before Stein could finish. " . . . a lot."

THE REST OF THAT DAY FOUND STEIN SITTING AT A LOCAL pub drinking glass after glass of Pepsi, and reviewing Irene's file. Something about his conversation with her brother felt wrong. The man had seemed uncommonly nervous when Stein had mentioned the missing pages. To Stein, Ben White's questions appeared preplanned, not the type of inquiry he would have anticipated from a man mourning his just-buried sister.

Irene had never been a careless person when it came to her writing, and Stein couldn't envision her misplacing the last four pages of her novel. The only conclusion he could draw from his suspicions was that someone had removed the pages before shipping the manuscript. But who — and why — had Stein totally perplexed; it didn't make any sense.

"Another Pepsi, Art," came a voice from above Stein.

Stein looked up into the face of the bartender, and his good friend, Sal Bonino. Bonino was a giant of a man, standing over six foot five, and topping the scales, Stein guessed, at over three hundred pounds. "Ya. Hope I'm not taking too much space here."

Bonino waved his arms into the air, then pointed toward two men standing at the bar. "Count 'em. You're one of three paying customers. You can take all the room you want."

Stein smiled. "A little slow."

"Like molasses in January." Bonino laughed — his belly shook. "I'll get your Pepsi."

As Stein reviewed Irene's manuscript for the second time, he started to see some direct parallels between the story and her real life. The setting of the book, the location of the story, and the problems of the lead character became all too clear. He couldn't believe the similarity between the two women was purely coincidental.

The protagonist in the novel was an elderly woman who resided in northern Vermont; Irene lived in upstate New York. The protagonist was a writer and amateur sleuth; Irene was both. The protagonist was unmarried, an invalid, and dependent on her sister for all of her life situations; Irene was paralyzed, confined to a wheelchair, and dependent on her brother for many of those same things. The protagonist was writing her autobiography and being threatened by three people who could be harmed if the work was ever published. And . . .

"That's got to be it," said Stein outloud, spilling his partially finished Pepsi over several pages of the manuscript. "Damn."

As Stein unconsciously wiped the sticky soda from off the pages, his thoughts were already whirling with bizarre possibilities surrounding Irene's death. Quickly, he removed a file from his briefcase that contained all the letters Irene had sent him over the past few months. He read several letters before tossing them aside, then tried to hold back the lump that was rapidly rising in his throat.

In his despair and self-centered depression following Irene's sudden death, Stein had failed to decipher what she had written into her last letters. Rereading them for a third time pushed the meaning into clear view: Irene had been trying to tell him she was about to be murdered!

"I'M AN IDIOT," MUTTERED STEIN, PULLING OUT AND READING the last letter she had mailed him. "This isn't even from Irene. She never signed off with best regards."

Stein, hoping that his theory concerning Irene's death would prove inconclusive and without merit, poured over her letter of March 13th. And it was that letter which convinced him that Irene had been blackmailed by Dailey before she was murdered by her brother. He didn't understand the connection between Dailey and Ben White, but he was satisfied the answers could be found in the missing manuscript pages. All that he had to do now was break into the vault, locate the last four pages of the novel, and supply that information to the police. The missing pages would prove that Irene was murdered. Stein,

trembling slightly, swore he would see Ben White and Paul Dailey put behind bars for life.

But the idea of breaking into a vault and rummaging through Irene's belongings put Stein's temperament into upheaval. He had never been a brave man, especially when it involved committing a felony, or when it entertained ideas of ghosts and the dead. As the day turned into night, and as the idea of his quest became perfectly clear, Stein changed the Pepsi he had been drinking to beer, and then to bourbon.

After several hours of pouring burning bourbon into his veins, Stein swayed into his apartment — drunk. But the whiskey had given him enough courage to phone Penn Station and book himself on the morning train to Plattsburgh. As Stein slumped into his bed, he thought of Irene. She had been too good a friend to be buried under the guise of "death by natural causes." He would see to it that justice was done; he, at least, owed her that much.

FIGHTING A RAGING HEADACHE, COMBINED WITH A BUBBLING stomach, Stein watched the white, frozen landscape of upstate New York flash by outside the frosted window of his train compartment. He was having second thoughts. Why not just bring the police into it right away, he thought, scanning the pad of paper on which he had summarized the sinister plot of Dailey and Ben White.

"Proof. That's why," he muttered, answering his own thoughts. "I don't have any proof."

But tonight, after he had broken into the vault, he would have the proof he needed, and then he could contact the authorities and have both Dailey and Ben White arrested. Stein grunted. He knew that this hopeful scenario was the only reason he would even consider doing what he would do that night. Dabbling with the dead was not his idea of a pleasant Saturday night.

THE RENTAL CAR'S TIRES SQUEAKED THROUGH THE SNOW, momentarily drowning out the howling wind that raced through the barren branches of trees lining the road leading into the ocean of gravestones. Stein surveyed the snow covered scene; the cemetery was larger than he had anticipated for a city the size of Plattsburgh. It took him over twenty minutes to find the vault where Irene had been laid to rest.

The vault, its white stone merging with snow that had drifted along

its walls, stood near the edge of the cemetery. It was surrounded by a cluster of tall trees that were now only silhouettes against the grey sky. The vault was larger than Stein had imagined, and, in the white and slate grey of a New York winter, it looked cold — dead cold.

Shoving the car into park, Stein waited until the last lingering rays of twilight pushed the rural landscape into a blackness unfamiliar to city dwellers like himself. He couldn't believe how dark a dark night could be until now. He had never experienced rural nightscapes before, and, needless to say, it produced a strong case of insecurity to blanket his enthusiasm.

Only a bare outline of the vault remained visible when Stein started to gather the tools he had purchased from a hardware store in Plattsburgh. A bolt cutter, crow bar, pliers, rope, and two flashlights lay next to him on the seat. Stein fondled the items as he searched his soul for the courage he would need to use them.

After several minutes of painful deliberation, highlighted by visions of Dracula and other midnight aberrations, Stein pushed the car door open to the bitter cold of a March wind. He shuttered against the icy blast as it penetrated his light overcoat.

With a conviction enhanced by the blustery weather, Stein hurried to the passenger side of the car, removed the tools, and stepped into the deep snow leading to the door of the vault. He had to struggle against knee deep snow to keep his motion forward. Stein had not experienced such weather since he was a child growing up in Boston. Sliding on his gloves, he wished he was back in his condominium, reading poor quality manuscripts sent in by hopeful writers. His apartment's four walls seemed uncommonly friendly at the moment.

When he reached the doorway, Stein cleared the entrance with his hands and feet — he had forgotten to purchase a snow shovel. Several minutes later, Stein, with fingers numbed from the snow, snapped on one of the flashlights and inspected the entryway.

His first fear was placated when he found the door had not been cemented shut. As quick as he could manage with his nearly frostbitten fingers, Stein inspected the lock, bringing the light to rest on the metal which separated him from the blowing cold outside to the calm cold inside the tomb. He lifted the bolt cutters, put the jaws securely around the lock, and, in the next instant, forced his weight against the metal. A hollow "thud" sounded, and the lock was sheared. Stein shoved the door open and moved inside.

Scanning the light quickly to all the corners of the vault, Stein

assessed the room. When he was sure there were no demons hovering nearby that could attack him, he shut the door to the wintery outside and continued his inspection.

The room was totally unlike anything he had imagined during his train ride. It was the farthest thing from a fearful setting, this fully furnished, clean office. One wall was covered with books; hundreds of expensive looking, leather bound books from ceiling to floor. Across from the books on the opposite wall was a leather couch and matching love seat, a coffee table, and a set of end tables, complete with lamps. A desk of ornate wood stood near the entrance. Several filing cabinets and a few scatter rugs completed the furniture.

And there were paintings on every wall. Paintings of woodland scenes, a portrait of Irene in her younger days, and scenes from various Shakespearian plays. Vased, but now wilted flowers, adorned every table that was not covered with small statues or other memorabilia Irene had collected throughout her life. Stein was mesmerized by the completeness of the room. Ben White had not exaggerated when he said Irene had been buried in her office. Without the casket placed offensively in the center of the tomb, the room could have been an office in any building in any city across the land.

Stein's gaze moved to the metal box. He was relieved when he saw that she had not been placed in a concrete vault like what was customary for ground burials. It was a simple casket, constructed of bronze, with silver handles. The initials I.W. were embossed in the lid.

With frozen vapors pouring from his nostrils and open mouth, Stein moved cautiously toward the casket. Taking a deep breath, he placed his hands on the lid, started to push it back, then stopped. He was apprehensive about staring into Irene's dead face, and even less enthusiastic about plunging his hands beneath the covering and touching her flesh. The thought forced his hands off the casket.

But that was what he would have to do if he wanted the final pages of the novel, and the proof to put Ben White and Dailey on trial for murder. His thoughts retreated to the letter of March 13th where he had deciphered the whereabouts of the missing pages. The words "it will be nice to get the matter off my chest, even after my ending, if you know what I mean," echoed through his mind. "God, I hate doing this," whispered Stein as his hands moved up to grip the icy, cold metal. "Damn."

The lid moved. Stein shut his eyes when he pushed the cover back onto the main body of the casket. When he knew the lid was free, he

slowly opened his eyes. Irene's tranquil face, eyes closed, with hands folded across her chest, loomed in front of the slits in Stein's eyelids that gave him just enough light to see that she was, indeed, inside the box. Somehow he wished she hadn't been.

"You could have done this another way, Irene," said Stein as he started his hand toward the neckline of her dress. When his fingers accidentally touched her frozen neck flesh, Stein jumped and pulled his hand back to the warmth of his pocket.

After gathering his courage for a second attempt at securing the missing pages of manuscript Stein was determined to extract the pages without coming in contact with her skin again. When he realized that such a maneuver would be impossible, Stein, bringing unknown staunchness to his shaking arm, plunged his hand deeply below the neckline of the dress. As before, cold flesh greeted his warm fingers.

He was about to remove his hand for the second time when he felt and heard the scrap of his fingernails move across paper. Reaching well below her breasts, Stein found a package, and removed it as fast as he could manage. A green wrapped envelope emerged from inside her dress, revealing the seal Irene used on all her correspondence.

Stein let out a sigh, broke the seal on the envelope, and took out the pages. There was a cover letter with the missing pages. Shoving the flashlight under his arm, Stein lowered the letter where he could read it.

14 March

Dear Arthur,

If you're reading this letter, then I must assume that you have been a good sleuthhound, and were able to decipher the clues I left for you to discover. Let me say, first, that I'm very proud of you, Arthur. I must admit, the clues weren't that easy to follow. Good work.

Secondly, let me say that poor old Ben, and that scoundrel nephew of mine, Paul Dailey, had nothing to do with my death. I used them so you would have a good reason to brave the elements and visit me here in my last resting place. Unbeknownst to you, I have been ill for some

time. I didn't want to burden you with my problems, so, I never confided in you. I apologize.

Oh, Arthur, I would have so much liked to have seen the expression on your face when you opened my coffin. I bet you were scared, weren't you? Come on. Admit that you were scared.

["I was scared out of my shorts," muttered Stein, as a smile began to form on his face.]

Thirdly, the last four pages of the manuscript are now in your hands. I think you will find them very rewarding. It has been one of my favorite stories, but not my best.

["There were none better, Irene," said Stein.]

And last but not least, I have a little surprise for you, Arthur. You remember that time in my writing career when I wasn't able to produce any work for almost three years?

["I sure do."]

Well, during those three years I wrote four novels. Those four novels are my gift to you for being such a good detective. And Arthur, they are the best things I have ever written. You'll find them in the filing cabinet under (pardon the expression) the dead file. I think you'll be pleased to find that the protagonist in all of the novels is a literary agent who suddenly finds his work boring and begins a detective agency. You want to guess the man's name?

["I wouldn't have the slightest idea," said the now smiling Stein.]

The man's name is Arthur Klein. I thought that was close enough, don't you?

Well, Arthur, this is my final goodbye. I love you and wish you the best of luck always.

*Love (I mean)
Best Wishes,*

Irene

Stein, laughing as he slid the lid back over Irene's head, thought he could discern a changed expression in her face; it was as if the slightest of smiles now adorned her mouth. This grand, old lady had been the queen of practical jokes, a fact that Stein had totally forgotten in his wave of depression and bitterness following her death.

Moving toward the filing cabinet, Stein stopped, and waved the flashlight onto the coffin once more. "And you knew, didn't you, Irene. You knew I'd forget."

AFTER YEARS OF WRITING MYSTERY BEST SELLERS, IRENE White is still riding high; each book in the Arthur Klein series, (the series about a bumbling, literary agent turned detective), has made the best seller list for record number of weeks. No doubt Irene would find that quite amusing.

MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAKERS

J. W. Sternquist (Ghost Writer) *tells us:*

I am thirty-four years old with a degree in civil engineering; however, as of yet, I have never used that degree for any of the vocations I held during the past twelve years. I have been a computer operator, a flight instructor, a commercial pilot, a stock broker, and a national sales manager for a fortune five hundred company. But even during those years of weekly paychecks, I have always been a writer — in heart and in spirit. So, eight months ago, I took the plunge and became a full-time freelancer. I have not regretted that decision.

I have had articles and short stories published in Plane & Pilot and other national magazines; several other manuscripts have been accepted by editors, but to date, they have not been published. I have two novels in the works, with one reference book under serious consideration by several publishing houses. I am planning another book about the writer and the computer.

It was a frightening thought: the would-be killer could strike at Gantly at any time — and he would succeed and get away with his crime, unless —

DEAD EASY

by PAUL BISHOP

GRANTLY'S OBSCENE FORM THUDDING INTO THE DEEP ARM-chair and slumped into a disoriented mass. When he looked up at the black garbed figure in front of him he was rewarded by the jarring impact of the gun's short barrel being slammed into his forehead and twisted into the expanse of wrinkled fat that sagged across it. The time span, from the trigger releasing the already cocked hammer and the firing pin striking home, was only long enough for the events of the past evening to flash before his eyes, mercifully saving him from having to review his wasted life in its entirety. The flashback was just a little pffft! and then it was gone.

THE NOISE OF GLASSES TINKLING AND SOFT MUSIC MADE AN almost undefinable background to the ever loudening roar of conversation. The cocktail party was being thrown by the new owners of the Cosmopolitan Syndicate of Broadcasting, station KCSB, a new cable channel due to start broadcasting in Los Angeles, and was being given in celebration of the end of the week long broadcast format presentations, one of which would provide the direction for the new station's programming.

Today was Friday and the last of the three main presentations had ended that afternoon. The voting by the board of directors as to which of the formats they thought best, would be held on the following Monday, giving all the members a chance to think over their decisions during the weekend ahead.

Phillip Grantly was a grotesque lump of a human being. He had just passed his 55th birthday and weighed more than two normal size men. Even his 6'5" height could not compensate for his great amount of excess weight. His head was almost totally bald with large brown spots all competing for space on this ample pate. As he sipped his drink his triple chin quivered sending beads of sweat dribbling down the front of his ill cut tux. Grantly was sweating profusely, he always sweated profusely, hence there was almost always a lingering odor around him making people stand far back and upwind of him. That was one reason why he was standing by himself in one corner of the room while the party crashed on around him, the other reason was that Grantly was a totally unmitigating, insulting s.o.b. to anyone who talked to him. He had money, which had bought him position, and believed he needed nothing else.

His isolation aside, Grantly was feeling very pleased with himself. After all, wasn't his going to be the deciding vote on Monday? Wasn't he the only board member who hadn't committed himself to one or the other of the format presentations? Didn't he hold the power of success or failure over all the hopefuls involved? Damn right on all counts, thought Grantly. He finally was in a position to squeeze them for all the respect he was due. The feelings of power he had conjured up for himself made him feel slightly giddy.

He swirled the ice in his drink and glanced about him at the other party goers. His wife had not come with him tonight, begging off at the last minute by claiming a headache. It was probably just as well he thought, now at least he wouldn't have to put up with her incessive nagging all night long. Standing by the open French doors Grantly spotted David Thomas and Mark Richards who headed up the first of the format presentations. They were dressed as always in identically-cut suits of complementing colors, a habit that had earned them the nicknames of Ping and Pong. Both were in their late forties and had been in the business for a long time, still looking for the break which would shoot them to the top of the heap.

Their format was based on the standard educational approach. Nothing really new or flashy but a solidly thought out presentation

with the facts on viewer needs and interests to back it up. After a week of striving for the spotlight, they seemed content to stand back and blend in with the gracefully flowing draperies that billowed gently in the evening breeze.

"I hope you're sweating, you little creeps," Grantly said under his breath. "I'm going to make all of you wait till Monday to see which way I'm going to jump!" He knocked back the rest of his drink before having his attention drawn to a commotion by the exit.

KURT DESMOND, THE HEAD OF THE SECOND PRESENTATION (a commercial format that had some rather lucrative benefits to its credit), had been helping his young wife into her coat when she had dropped her purse and spilt the contents onto the polished hardwood floor. As Desmond bent over to help retrieve the items, his clothing clung to his body in strange folds, making his thin angular body look more awkward than normal.

Grantly's sense of power grew, knowing that if he voted against Desmond's presentation, the man would begin a rapid descent to the bottom of the executive ladder. The week of lobbying and showmanship had taken its toll on Desmond and the strain could clearly be seen etched into his face.

I can break you, you simpleton, just with the cast of my vote! Grantly swelled visibly with the thought. God! This power felt good! Maybe when he got home he'd find enough oomph to give his wife a quick tumble. To hell with her headache, she'd love it!

Grantly was still standing alone when he felt rather than saw somebody staring at him. He looked behind him and searched the crowded bar until his eyes locked onto those of the dynamic young executive who represented the third and final faction of the format presentations, Adam Twill. Twill was staring intently at Grantly over the rim of the tall glass he held in his long tapering fingers, making Grantly feel uncomfortable, the feelings of power that he had had all evening starting to dissolve under the scrutiny.

Twill was an imposing figure by any standards. His 6'2", 180 lb. frame was graced with long flowing lines and muscles that stood out under his evening dress like they had been slapped on with a towel. A shock of close cropped blond hair topped off his razor-sharp facial features. Like Twill, his broadcasting format was innovative and unique. His approach ran the gamut of experimental television, everything from educational programs for both children and adults that

were far ahead of their time, in both content and teaching approach, to the latest in laser and heliograph techniques in programming.

Grantly started to sweat more profusely than normal. Twill's stare had somehow unsettled his feelings of well being. He did not like Twill because he felt Twill to be the kind of man who does not let anything shake him, a man able to take all things in his stride. He disliked him because he could not control him, he had no power over him. He knew that if he voted against him, Twill would just take his effort elsewhere until he finally clicked. He was not the type of man you could hold back. Delay for a time yes, but not stop completely.

But here Grantly was wrong in a way. Twill had had enough of delays and hold ups. For him this project was the culmination of too much effort and time to just have it dropped by the wayside because some obese manifestation of an armpit held the deciding vote. Twill already knew that Grantly would vote against him. His programming ideas were too *avante-garde* for a man in Grantly's position to take a chance on. Unless . . . unless the right encouragement, the right pressure was applied with just the right amount of flair and evil.

Twill diverted his eyes away from Grantly's and sipped his drink, his sharp features assembling themselves into a wiry grin. Yes, it was going to be dead easy really; all that you needed was the right pressure.

A WHITE JACKETED WAITER MOVED THROUGH THE BOBBING crowd with a long cool glass balanced on a silver tray extended above his shoulders. Other party revelers beckoned to the waiter who studiously ignored them and continued his beeline towards Phillip Grantly. As he approached he slowed his gait and wrinkled his nose in disgust at the malodorous smell that emanated from this mountain of a man. But he had been well paid by the fair haired gentleman at the bar to deliver the drink with the funny coaster he had not been allowed to see. All part of what the man at the bar had deemed a practical joke. The waiter didn't care, his shift was over in five minutes and all he was thinking about was getting off and going to see Maria who would be waiting for him, her proud body so vibrant and alive . . . the mountain turned to face him.

"Another drink, Sir?" the waiter asked, bringing the tray down to within Grantly's reach. "Compliments of the house."

"Compliments of the house?" queried Grantly, his eyebrows knotting slightly.

"Yes Sir, one for all the board members." It was what all the waiters, who the man at the bar had asked to deliver drinks to the board members, had been told to say but only his had the special coaster.

"Thanks," said Grantly begining to feel important again. As he took the drink off the tray the paper coaster came with it, condensation sticking it to the bottom of the glass.

The waiter hovered next to Grantly, who stared at him distastefully.

"If you're waiting for a tip, forget it. The drink is on the house, go ask your boss for a quarter." Grantly laughed at his little joke and turned his back on the waiter, who moved away with a look of contempt creasing his face.

Grantly sipped the drink. He hadn't really wanted it but it was free so what the hell, he'd finish it and head for home. He took a larger swallow of the drink and as the amber liquid half revealed the bottom of the glass he saw there was something written on the coaster. Holding the liquor in the back of his throat and savoring its burning sensation, he removed the coaster from the bottom of the glass and read what had been written on it in a childish backhand scrawl.

"You have just swallowed enough poison to kill an elephant," the coaster read. "You will begin to feel the effects in about ten seconds and be dead in thirty. **YOU HAVE JUST BEEN MURDERED!**"

Grantly paled and dropped the glass, spitting what liquid he still held in his mouth over the front of his tux. Quickly he stuck two fingers down his throat and was violently sick all over the hall's plush white rug. Twill, watching from the bar, moved quickly to Grantly's side.

"What's the matter, Mr. Grantly? Is there anything I can do?" he asked taking Grantly's arm.

"Oh God, I've been poisoned!" Grantly croaked, not realizing that more than thirty seconds had passed since he had read the coaster.

People around the room were all stopping to stare, some thinking it was just somebody that had gone passed his limit, others secretly amused that it was Grantly making a spectacle of himself.

"It's on the coaster . . . on the coaster," breathed Grantly, putting his head down between his knees, still waiting for the effects of the poison to take hold.

Twill palmed the suspect coaster and replaced it with a blank one. "There's nothing on the coaster," he claimed holding it out for Grantly to see.

Grantly looked at him in bewilderment, not comprehending, "But it

said I had just been murdered!"

"Come now, Sir. Our coasters do not carry any such statements." This came from the waiter who had hovered around to see the results of the practical joke and was enjoying himself immensely.

"Let me help you clean up and find a cab," said Twill.

"Yes, Yes please," Grantly simpered, realizing for the first time what a fool he must appear and wanting only to be away from all the prying eyes.

Still slightly bewildered he allowed himself to be guided away by Twill's strong hands. Twill smiled to himself. Now for phase two.

AS THE CAB SPED ALONG, GRANTLY SAT QUIETLY, TRYING TO compose himself. He felt rage and humiliation over what had happened at the party. He had made a fool out of himself over what had turned out to be some kind of a hoax. To top it all off there had been Twill's insufferable superiority and the bit about there being no writing on the coaster, but he was really too upset to give it much thought.

High up on Mulholland Drive, Grantly electronically opened twelve foot tall gates to admit the cab to his grounds. The gates were the only break in the surrounding wall from which protruded foot long spikes. The cab crunched on the gravel drive and two low slung shapes detached themselves from the shadows, running on silent paws to follow the cab up to the entrance steps of the two story Tudor structure that Grantly called home. Grantly called softly to the dobermans and watched as their attitude changed from protective aggression to the subdued joy of having their master home. He then paid off the cabbie but did not wait for his change, showing how much the evening's events had really shaken him. The cab slid away, tripping an electronic eye that opened the front gates again for a few moments before they again returned to their job of keeping the outside world at bay.

As he entered the house, Grantly noticed an unfamiliar, official looking car, parked at the end of the circular drive. He also saw that the lights in the sitting room were on, which was strange as Mary had gone to bed before he left. Fumbling with his keys, he stepped through the oak doors and called out to his wife as he walked up the hallway.

"Mary. I'm home."

He heard the scraping of chairs in the sitting room followed by Mary's light footsteps as she rushed into the hall looking pale and drawn. She was a small woman with mousey hair and large dumpy breasts and was dressed in a pink housecoat that did nothing for her.

She wore nothing on her feet save for red toenail polish.

"Phillip! Oh, Phillip!" she cried as she moved towards him. "They told me you were dead!"

Grantly took her in his arms, more surprised at first by her unusual show of affection than by the words she had spoken.

A short well-kept man in a nondescript suit walked slowly out of the sitting room followed by a slightly taller and younger version out of the same mold. The two men approached Grantly who still had his arms around his wife.

"Mr. Grantly?" inquired the older one.

"Yes, that's right," answered Grantly, his usual brash attitude missing under these somewhat strange circumstances.

"Mr. Phillip Grantly?"

"Yes, yes! Now look what's this all about?"

"I'm Detective Georges and this is Detective Richards," the older man said, gesturing towards the younger man next to him. "I'm afraid that there seems to be some kind of a misunderstanding here." When Grantly only glared without saying anything, Georges continued. "Do you recognize either of these items, Mr. Grantly?" he asked, taking a brown legal envelope from Richards and emptying the contents into his hand.

"Why yes I do!" exclaimed Grantly. "That's a masonic ring like the one I'm wearing and that looks like my wallet that went missing two days ago."

"Did you report your wallet as stolen?" This came from Richards in a brash immature voice.

"No, I didn't report it. I just thought that I'd misplaced it. It's happened to me before." Grantly looked a bit sheepish for a second, but then a cloud seemed to pass over his features and, as if somebody had flipped a switch, his attitude changed abruptly.

"Now look; I asked you before what this is all about! What is the meaning of coming here and upsetting my wife?" Mary Grantly looked up from her husband's chest as if becoming aware for the first time of the mess that he was in physically.

Richards stammered for a second and then deferred to his older partner for guidance. Georges took the initiative and began to explain. "Communications got an anonymous call tonight that there was a body floating in the wash. When a couple of patrol officers investigated, they found a body that looked like it had been in the water for about six hours. It had this ring on its finger and your wallet in its

pocket. When we checked the drivers license we assumed that it contained the correct identification for the body, especially since the physical description was so close."

This last part was said in a somewhat cautious voice as Georges ran his eyes over Grantly's immense body size.

"We came to notify your wife, who said it couldn't be you as you had only left a few hours previously. We were trying to explain that we weren't quite sure how long the body had been in the wash and trying to calm her down, when you came home," Georges finished, defiantly holding Grantly's gaze as if condemning him for still being alive.

When Grantly spoke again his voice was menacing, "Well, as you can see, I am still breathing and you're sadly mistaken if you think that you are going to be able to sweep this type of mistake under the rug! I will be on the phone to your superiors in the morning to demand a written apology from you for upsetting my wife!" Georges seemed about to interrupt but Grantly just ignored him and continued, "I suggest that you take your leave now and get out there and find out just who's body it was in the wash and what he was doing with my wallet. I pay my taxes and I expect some return on them. If you'll be on your way, maybe I can attend to my wife."

Richards had turned red in the face under this barrage. He started to spit out a reply, but Georges grabbed him by his suit sleeve and started for the door. Grantly called his dogs and held on to them as the two detectives walked out to their car. Richards climbed in and started the old Ford up but Georges hesitated for a second and then returned to the door.

"We might as well let you have this back now," he said, handing Grantly his water soaked wallet, "I'm sorry we have caused you and your wife so much concern."

Grantly grunted and watched as the Ford bounced along the drive and out of the grounds. The electric gates slid silently behind the car's passing and Grantly released the dogs again.

Back inside again Grantly made soothing sounds to his wife and then sent her upstairs to bed before walking down to his darkened library. Turning on an antique lamp he poured himself a drink and opened his returned wallet to make sure everything was there. Inside he found an unfamiliar piece of paper which he unfolded and read. Paling abruptly Grantly felt his blood chill. The note was written in the same childish backhand as the coaster had been. He read it through again . . . "See how easy it would be? Nothing to it really. You're here one moment

and then gone the next, the hospital tag would simply read: deceased. You're a very vulnerable man, Grantly, very vulnerable. YOU HAVE JUST BEEN MURDERED AGAIN!"

Grantly walked over to his desk and picked up his phone. He dialed the operator and asked for the police department.

After verifying with the operator that he wanted information and not emergency service, a soft efficient voice came on the line.

"Los Angeles Police Department. West Valley Area desk."

"Yes, could you tell me if you have a Detective Georges or a Detective Richards working out of your station?"

"One moment Sir, let me check." The voice was gone for a moment leaving Grantly to stew in his ever increasing anticipation.

"Sir? Both detectives work in this area but one is in the hospital right now recovering from an injury and the other is on vacation. The other detectives will be back on duty at eight in the morning if there is someone else who can help you."

"Can you tell me if there was a body recovered from the wash earlier this evening?"

"We've had nothing come through the station here Sir and I've seen nothing on the teletype from the other divisions. Is there something we should know about?"

"No, no, it's alright. I'll call back in the morning," Grantly said and quickly hung up the phone before the desk officer could ask any further questions. He stood for a minute with his hand on the receiver and his eyes closed. He could smell something around him which was not just the odor of perspiration, he didn't know it but it was the smell of fear.

THE SILENT FIGURE STANDING IN THE SHADOWS OUTSIDE OF Grantly's grounds watched as the car carrying Georges and Richards drove out of the gates and away down the street. The figure was dressed all in black with a shock of blond hair only visible for a second before a dark knit ski mask was slid over it, hiding the figure's identity from view.

The figure reached into the large duffel bag by his side and removed several pieces of foam rubber that had been spray painted black along with twice as many canvas straps with metal buckles. Strapping the foam rubber pieces around his calves, thighs, forearms and upper arms he left room at all his joints to allow for freedom of movement. A final piece was secured around his neck, giving him the overall effect

of a demented hockey player without his skates.

Using the night's shadows for cover, he removed a small collapsible trampoline from the duffel bag and placed it about six feet from the front wall of Grantly's grounds. Seemingly satisfied with his handiwork he stepped back, took a deep breath and then four quick steps and a leap which placed him squarely in the middle of the trampoline. He collapsed his knees and then extended them as the springs of the tramp recoiled him smoothly into the air.

With body control developed over long periods of training, the figure sailed over the wall, clearing the spikes by a good foot. The figure landed silently on the other side, his knees giving slightly to cushion the shock and his body falling forward into a well practiced shoulder roll. He was on his feet instantly, all his senses alive to the danger of the dobermans somewhere on the grounds. When they did not immediately appear, he turned his attention to the house, seeing Grantly's shadow move across the library window. Moving quickly on crepe soled shoes he slithered across the lawn to the French doors of the sitting room.

When the dogs did come, it was with such speed that they almost caught him unaware. He sensed them rushing towards him and turned to face their attack, his back to a tree of a variety he couldn't discern in the dark. He had to do this right the first time because there would be no second chance. The first dog lept straight at him without fear. He waited for the exact second that the dog left the ground, knowing that once it did it would be committed to its course. He started to fall backwards, grabbing the dog's outstretched front paws and threw him over his head into the tree behind him. The dog hit the ground with a thud and lay still, not even a whimper from the pain of its broken limbs escaped its throat. The dark figure rolled over and regained his feet but not before the second dog had materialized from nowhere to sink bared teeth into his foam-encased arm. Instead of fighting the dog, the figure grabbed it by the back of its neck and shoved his arm further back into the dog's jaws. Locked into a death struggle the two forms fell to the ground, the man pinning the dog with his body and only releasing his hand from the dog's neck for long enough to pull a knife from his belt and thrust it to the hilt where his hand had been a moment before, killing the dog like a matador would finish a bull. The struggle ended.

PICKING HIMSELF UP, THE DARK FIGURE STARTED TO SHAKE

as the adrenaline in his body began to overload. He sat down for a second and breathed slowly before stripping off the foam rubber armor that he no longer needed. Even though the night's air was cool, he was sweating from his exertions and though the dog's teeth had not broken the skin, his arm still hurt badly.

Standing up again, he resumed his approach to the house. At the French doors which led to the sitting room, he listened to see if there was any interest in the commotion he had caused. When he was satisfied that there was no unusual activity he set back to his task.

Searching quickly around the door he found the alarm wires at the top of the door jam. Removing a length of wire with an alligator clip at either end, and a pair of wire cutters from one of the two zippered pouches on his belt, he bypassed the system and cut the main power wire. Stepping back he hesitated for a second before taking another, even closer look at the door. This time he discovered a secondary system, a pressure button hidden cleverly between the crack where the doors met. Using an inch wide strip of celluloid he slipped the latch and then slid the lid down to hold the button flush as he opened the door. He slid the strip out again, once he had entered.

Smiling softly to himself the figure moved across the room and let himself into the hall where he ran silently to the open library door where he ascertained that Grantly was occupied with making himself another drink. Moving back to the stairway, he lightfooted it up to the master bedroom where the regular deep breaths of Mary Grantly testified to her slumbering state. Silently he lifted the covers on the side of the bed furthest from the sleeping woman's form and with one quick movement removed something from his second waist pouch and placed it on the mattress before lowering the covers again and moving from the room.

Like something out of a magic act the figure made a wraithlike entrance into the library. Grantly turned from his contemplation of the fireplace, expecting to see his wife, and stared at the black clad figure with a look of fear and puzzlement. Beads of sweat immediately popped out on his forehead.

"W-W-Who are y-you?" he stammered, losing all semblance of poise.

"It's time," stated the figure in a deep growling voice.

"Time . . . ?" questioned Grantly.

As if the half question were some kind of cue the figure lunged from the doorway and tossed aside the obviously heavy desk that stood

between him and Grantly, discarding it like a child with an unwanted toy. Turning a noticeable shade of green, Grantly started to scream but was cut short as the figure lashed out a long right arm, catching him full across the mouth with an open palm, making his triple chin quiver violently and sending blobs of sweat in all directions.

With tremendous aggression the figure advanced on Grantly, knocking him backwards over an armchair situated to the right of the fireplace. Leaning over, the figure landed two sharp jabs flush into Grantly's open face. Defenseless, Grantly rolled onto his stomach and received a vicious kick to his ribs for his trouble.

"Stop! Stop! Anything, anything!" whimpered Grantly.

"Get up!" the voice said.

When Grantly didn't move, he received another kick to his rib-area, this one accompanied by the sounds of cracking bones.

"Now!"

The fat man struggled slowly to his knees and then found himself propelled into the large stuffed armchair he had originally tripped over.

The figure did another magic trick and a gun appeared in his hand. Bringing it up with force he smashed the barrel into Grantly's forehead and screwed the point into the skin, making the fat curl obscenely around it.

"It was so easy getting to you, Grantly! You might say it was dead easy. But it's all over now!"

THE SOUND OF THE GUN'S HAMMER FALLING ON AN EMPTY chamber echoed louder in the room than if a bullet had been fired. Grantly, his skin the color of cold oatmeal and his sweat surprisingly nonexistent, took a half breath.

"You have just been murdered," the figure said in a calm voice. "There is no way I can be caught. I can murder you again anytime, anywhere; it would be dead easy. All you must do to avoid it is make the right decisions in life, make the right decision on Monday."

And with that the figure turned and without a further word glided silently out of the room. One moment the gun barrel was screwing into Grantly's brain and the next second it was gone, leaving only a throbbing bruise as a reminder.

Moving at top speed, the figure ran down the driveway, breaking the electric eye that controlled the front gates, and scooted out to the relative freedom beyond the walls. Pulling off the ski mask and shaking

his tousled hair, Twill again allowed himself a small private smile.

Inside the house Grantly sat in the armchair, stunned by the evening's events, unable to catch his breath properly. Suddenly a piercing scream from upstairs propelled him into staggering action. In the master bedroom his wife was sitting bolt upright in the bed with the covers thrown down to reveal a small garden snake that had crawled across her legs while she slept, seeking the heat from between them.

Grantly lifted the harmless snake up gingerly in one meaty hand and opening the window screen flung it down to the yard below. He knew that there was only one man concerned with Monday's voting that was ruthless enough to do this, to go this far . . . only one.

MONDAY MORNING BROKE BRIGHT AND CLEAR ACROSS THE Southern California sky. The air was crisply cool and the busy city dwellers scurried back and forth with a minimum of fuss.

Phillip Grantly observed all this from the picture window that overlooked the front entrance to the KCSB studios. He was alone, waiting for the last candidate to arrive before going down to cast his vote.

With five minutes to go before the board meeting, Grantly observed Adam Twill exit from a taxi on the far side of the street. Grantly watched as Twill paid off the taxi and started to make his way illegally across the middle of the street, a habit Grantly had observed him perform every day during the format presentations.

When Twill was halfway across the street, a featureless gray car detached itself from the near side of the street and with ever-increasing speed hurtled towards Twill. From his aerie Grantly watched as the car's extra large bumper smashed into Twill and then dragged his fallen body under the car's carriage like a hungry python gobbling its prey. A crushed and mutilated mass bounced once as it emerged from behind the car, incapable of caring that the car was racing off into oblivion.

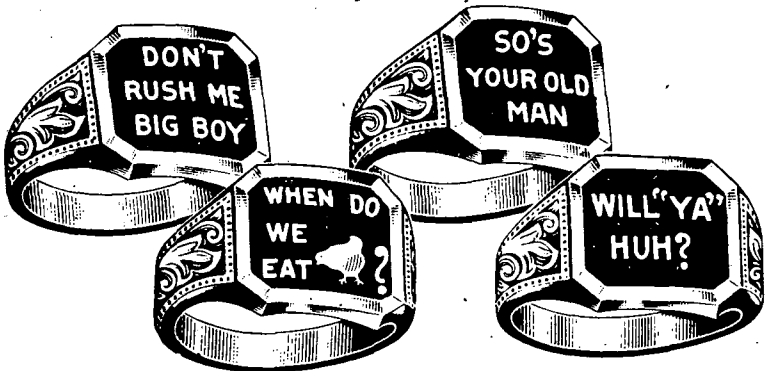
Grantly allowed himself a small private smile and started to waddle down the stairs to cast his vote. *Twill had been right*, he thought to himself. *It was easy, dead easy.* ●



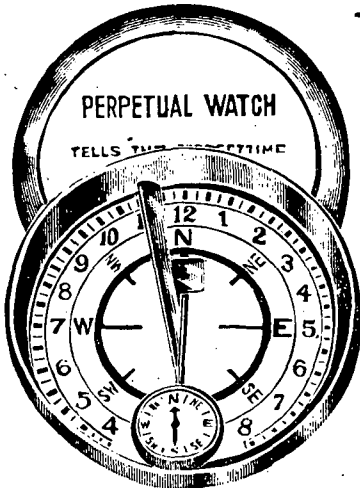
Motto Rings

Frequently a law-enforcement officer will be required to pass on information secretly to a confederate without any watching enemies becoming the wiser. These comical motto rings will often do the trick, right under the eyes of the unsuspecting eavesdroppers. Flash one of

these rings before the pretty blue eyes of a waitress in a restaurant and she'll get the message. Even if she's not a confederate, she might think you're cute and give you a date. Private detecting is a lonely profession, and you can use all the help you can get!



Perpetual Watch



It's important that a private eye know what time it is. He must be punctual in his appointments with wealthy clients. He must know the times of various assignations on the part of suspects. He must know when to knock off for lunch. Cheap watches are unreliable, and expensive ones are too frequently lifted by the unsavory riff-raff with whom even self-respecting p.i.'s come in contact. The answer is the Perpetual Watch, which never runs down, never needs batteries, and because it is powered by the Sun itself is guaranteed for the life of the watch, the watch's owner, or the Sun, whichever ends first. The Perpetual Watch also comes in a special glow-in-the-dark model for night use.

*There shouldn't have been any witnesses to what he did.
But when he looked up, there she was, staring right in
his direction!*

See Jack Run

by ROBERT CHESMORE

JACK GARRETT STOOD WELL BACK FROM THE EDGE OF THE balcony — he had no head for heights — and looked down into the deep gorge on the rim of which the house was perched. Morning sunlight was creeping down the brushy opposite wall of the canyon toward the tumbled rocks below.

Jack doubted anyone would think it strange that both of his wives had met accidental deaths. The little sealskin boat back in Pittsburgh was rotten enough to have drowned Dorothy without any assistance from him. Likewise the balcony rail was at the point of falling off of its own accord, though he *had* loosened a few screws a while back and applied a dash of salt to add bite to the Los Angeles smog.

He knelt and tightened a screw slightly; he didn't want the damned rail to fall off before he even got Ellen out here.

He *might* have to give her a gentle nudge tonight, but probably she would lean against the railing, herself and look up at the stars as she had done on their wedding night one year ago.

Jack Garrett was thirty-seven and ruggedly handsome. Though outwardly self-assured he actually was a rather insecure man, especially since the traumatic event of three years ago. When a man who is afraid of water gets dunked in the stuff it's bad, but if it happens while he is killing his wife, and somebody sees the whole thing it's infinitely worse.

However, since Julie Ferguson, for whatever reason, had remained silent about what she had seen, he had partially convinced himself she was no longer a threat.

This time there would be no witnesses.

He stepped into the house, closed the balcony door after him, and locked it. Downstairs he paused at the library door. Ellen was working on her club's bingo project, her blue-gray head bent over a dictionary. He approved of her preoccupation with such stupid philanthropies as this bingo benefit affair; they gave him more time with Francine — his young, honey-haired secretary, Francine.

Ellen looked up and said, "Happy anniversary, darling. Sorry about bingo being tonight."

"We can still have our little party, though, afterward on the balcony," Jack said.

"Of course. With the wine and candle-light and music just like a year ago. We'll make it a tradition, dear. I love traditions."

She bent to her work, and he departed, grateful for not having to go in and kiss her.

HE ENTERED HIS REAL-ESTATE OFFICE AND LOCKED THE door behind him. He did not want any business; if all went well he would soon close the joint permanently. Ellen had scarcely made a dent in her late husband's fortune, and Jack knew just where he stood; he and Ellen had made out their wills together.

He brought out the Scotch from his desk drawer and took a generous nip straight from the bottle.

Shortly after midnight it would all be over, and this time there would be no Julie Ferguson to give him weeks of sleepless nights. A strange woman, Mrs. Ferguson. Why had she not told a damned soul that she had seen him kill his wife?

He'd been wise to send Francine on vacation; she would sense something was wrong. Even now he was sweating like a butcher though the office was cool. Francine was naive, as Dorothy had been at first, but she was smarter than Dorothy — more perceptive. The

unthinkable could happen; he could lose her.

That was why he had to do something tonight that was harder than killing Dorothy, because this time the act was premeditated.

MARRYING JACK HAD BEEN JUST THE BEGINNING OF Dorothy's tough luck. The baby was born dead, she had a period of depression and began taking pills. Jack lost interest in her, and by the time they moved to Pittsburgh and Jack began working for Penn-dyno (manufacturers of electrical equipment) she was heavily into booze beside all the other stuff. In Pittsburgh she attempted the unoriginal act of jumping nude into a public fountain. Jack stopped her. Later she almost did something that would have been even more embarrassing to Jack.

He stopped her then, too. Stopped her cold.

When Jack rose to minor executive rank at Penndyno there were parties. Dorothy, the little country bumpkin turned lush, discovered she loved parties and liked to perform at them. Loaded with pills and booze there wasn't much she wouldn't do when she had an audience. Many people thought she was funny.

Jack never did.

They lived in a high class neighborhood on the shore of a small artificial lake. Directly across the lake was the mansion of old R.G. Whitcomb, president of Penndyno. Next door to Jack and Dorothy lived the Mitfords, Avery and Wanda. Mitford, a plump, garrulous man was an engineer. He'd worked on the Alaskan pipeline, and his house was littered with Eskimo artifacts.

On the night Dorothy died the Mitfords were having a party in honor of their house guest, a Julie Ferguson from Boston. Late in the evening Avery set up his movie projector and screen.

"Oh, Christ, not that," Dorothy shrieked.

"Shut up," said Jack.

Dorothy joined a noisy group at the bar and Jack took a seat next to Julie Ferguson. He liked the clean lines of her nearly classic profile. He guessed she was about his age.

Avery said, "Mrs. Ferguson has to leave soon to catch her plane, and she wanted to see these films."

They saw caribou, Eskimos, and a gory sequence involving a beached whale.

"Is that a kayak there in the background?" Julie asked.

"Yes," Avery said. "Notice the eskimo is laced up in a parka so both

man and boat are watertight. Incidentally I brought a kayak home with me. It's out by the lake, not in very good condition I'm afraid, and someone stole the parka."

Almost everyone had tried out Avery's kayak except Jack, who wouldn't venture on the water in anything smaller than an ocean liner.

At the end of the reel Jack said, "May I get you a drink, Mrs. Ferguson?"

"Thanks. A martini, please."

At the bar Dorothy had collared Bill Thomas, who also worked at Penndyno. In her brassy voice she was shouting, "Let's go out in old Avery's kayak."

Goddamn bitch, Jack thought. She would cost him his job some day. Old R.G. Whitcomb was straightlaced as hell, and Penndyno wasn't so big that R.G. couldn't keep track of what his executives and their wives were up to.

He returned with their drinks, but his conversation with Julie didn't get off the ground. Only when he discussed Penndyno did he elicit any response from her.

"Words fascinate me," she said. "You mentioned *stator* — obviously a stationary element in the electric generator — and *rotor* is the part that rotates."

Like your ass, baby, I'll bet.

Suddenly she was on her feet, saying something about spending a few moments with her hosts before she had to go.

He offered to take her to the airport. Let somebody else pour Dorothy into bed — anybody's bed.

"No, I rented a car. It's loaded and ready to go. If I don't catch that plane, I'm in trouble. Business, you know."

Okay. Screw you, Julie Ferguson.

He was nursing his drink when Bill Thomas rushed over and told him Dorothy had disappeared. "I think she's going out in the kayak."

"Damn," Jack said.

WHEN HE GOT TO THE BEACH SHE WAS SEVERAL YARDS OUT, wildly flailing the water with the kayak's double-bladed paddle. Her white flesh gleamed in the moonlight. She was naked.

He pushed Avery's canoe into the water and started paddling. He had to catch her before she got into deep water.

She turned and made a face at him. "Going to old R.G.'s party," she called back merrily.

He saw with horror that the Whitcomb mansion was lit from end to end and surrounded by parked cars. He had a frightening vision of R.G.'s face when Dorothy popped up nude in the midst of his guests.

The kayak began settling in the water. Thank God, Jack thought, Avery had let the sealskin boat rot throughout the winter.

Just as he reached her she flopped overboard and commenced to swim. Without a moment's thought he swung the canoe paddle, and the blade caught her in the temple. At the same moment he saw the water rushing up to meet him as the canoe overturned.

When he found himself submerged in water over his head he was too terrified to think about what he had seen in the split second before he went under, but in the next few months he would see, again and again, Julie Ferguson sitting in her car with the dome light on looking directly at him as he brought the paddle down on Dorothy's head.

In the underwater blackness his hand touched Dorothy's smooth, round shoulder. He pressed downward and his head bobbed to the surface. He grasped the frame of the kayak, floating at the waterline. The kayak tilted and instinctively he kicked downward. He felt the impact of his feet on Dorothy's pulpy, yielding mass, then there was nothing below but emptiness.

He kept his head above water enough to shout for help and Avery arrived soon in his motorboat and fished him out. Then Avery found Dorothy and got her into the boat, too. Jack got a glimpse of her head coming up with blood tinged lake water washing down and dripping from her chin. He vomited onto the bottom of the boat.

As Avery tried unsuccessfully to pound and breathe life into Dorothy everybody at the party gathered around.

Everybody but Julie Ferguson.

Who had a plane to catch and didn't want to get involved?

THE VERDICT OF THE CORONER'S INQUEST WAS THAT Dorothy had met accidental death by drowning. Contributory factors were the large amounts of alcohol, placidyl, and various other uppers and downers found in her body tissues. The cut on her temple was given little attention; everybody knew Dorothy fell down a lot.

The verdict did little to relieve Jack's anxiety over the next few months. Sooner or later he would hear from Julie Ferguson. She would blackmail him or her tongue would wag in the presence of the wrong people.

Depressed by his surroundings and in a state of near panic, Jack

impulsively quit his job and fled to Los Angeles, which was about as far as he could get from Pittsburgh, the detested lake, and Julie Ferguson in Boston.

He opened a real-estate office in L.A., barely made a living, and drank too much.

Once he dreamed he was in the lake, and a jellyfish-like mass — a sort of dual incubus of Dorothy and Julie was trying to suck him into the depths.

Then he met Ellen Frick and sold her a dilapidated old castle, which she liked so much that she invited him to dinner shortly after she moved in. The old walls were already soaking up the reek of money from her elegant furnishings, and Jack listened patiently to her plans for renovating the place.

She was older than Jack and looked ill, but in the ensuing weeks Jack gave her the courtly attention he would have bestowed upon any rich old woman or attractive young one. She was obviously charmed, but kept a tight hold on her purse strings. Plainly she wanted a husband, not a gigolo, so Jack married her.

An important element in his decision was the fact that she was popping nitro tablets like peanuts. Even if her heart lasted a few years she would probably let him handle her affairs. She seemed more concerned with her ecology club than her stock portfolio.

He couldn't have been more wrong. She continued to handle her financial matters and sought no help from him. Instead of the Porsche he wanted she bought him a Volks. Worst of all, her heart pains stopped and her cheeks filled out; she was healthy as a horse.

By midwinter he suspected that she knew about Francine.

He had hired Francine because she was young and pretty and an adequate typist. She fell in love with him, and he in turn found himself hooked as he had never been before. To lose her became unthinkable.

The trouble was she was a *good* girl — or meant to be. She even worried about their deceiving Ellen. Jack feared that at any time her puritanical upbringing might cause him to lose her.

The only solution to the problem was to get rid of Ellen.

AS JACK SAT IN THE SILENCE OF HIS OFFICE HE WONDERED how he had been able to endure for a whole year Ellen's sheep's eyes gazing soulfully up at him.

Nothing could possibly go wrong tonight. The low terrain on the balcony side of the house made it impossible for anyone to see him

push Ellen against the railing should that be necessary.

He wondered if Ellen would scream on the way down, knowing death was certain on the rocks below. He took another slug of Scotch from the bottle.

After a while he left the office and drove aimlessly around Burbank and Glendale for several hours, fantasizing occasionally that Francine was with him, and they were off to enjoy the freedom and elegance that Ellen's money was going to bring.

When he returned to the office the phone was ringing. He answered it only because it might be Francine calling long distance.

It was Ellen. "Busy, darling?"

"Sort of." He should have let the damn thing ring.

"I've had a lovely surprise. An old friend dropped in, but first maybe I should tell you about your visitors. They'd been to your office, but you were out. A policeman and a private eye."

A cop and a shamus? "Is this some kind of joke?"

She giggled. "I was kidding about the private eye — just an ordinary looking man with a thin mustache and a gray suit. The patrolman was genuine, though, but I'm sure you haven't committed some heinous crime."

True. A coroner's inquest had established that fact three years ago.

"About my visitor. She flew in from my home town, Boston. I baby-sat her years ago. She had no mother, and I think I took the place of one in her affections. We had gotten out of touch, but last week I wrote to her old address. Her father still lived there and gave the letter to her. Imagine my surprise when Julie popped up today in the flesh."

"Julie?"

"You sound startled. Anyway as I was going to say her name was Julie McCall. I didn't catch her married name today. She is very anxious to meet you. I had told her all about you in my letter — our marriage and — I hope you don't mind — about your first wife's accidental death in Pittsburgh."

"Why should I mind? Is she coming to your bingo thing tonight?"

"Yes, but she's not staying over with us, so she won't interfere with our little anniversary observance, but she was a dear today helping me with my bingo cards. It's a new game, and I was elected to hand make the special blue cards."

She was always getting elected, though he once overheard one of the "girls" saying, "Don't put Ellen on this. She'll botch it just from trying too hard."

"You see it's like regular bingo only with words. When you have a word exposed you call bingo. Julie was especially interested in the words I'd thought up. By the way, I won't be home, so you will have to eat out tonight. Be sure and buy lots of bingo cards at the party. It's in a good cause."

After she hung up the thought hit him as though for the first time:

Tonight I'm going to kill her.

He took another belt of Scotch. The waiting was getting to him. Even Ellen's cop and private eye bit had jolted him. The cop, of course, was Bud Cromwell. He had an exclusive on Cromwell's house. The guy with the thin mustache and the gray suit was probably a potential buyer.

Suppose Ellen's Julie really was Julie Ferguson. He let the unbelievable scenario unroll.

Woman sees man kill wife. Doesn't want to become involved. Later learns her beloved surrogate mother had married this man. Immediately flies west to warn her friend. Killer exposed.

Try to sell that to the movies.

Why not. They'd probably buy it.

WHEN HE WAS SURE ELLEN WOULD BE GONE HE DROVE home and parked in front of the house. Ellen had delayed renovation of the exterior so it looked as dilapidated as when she bought it. If the flimsy balcony aroused suspicion, Jack reflected that the whole house with its decaying seams and peeling paint would testify in his favor.

In the house he had a Scotch and Seltzer and wondered how he would react if Ellen's Julie looked like Julie Ferguson. Of course he had a very skimpy recollection of the latter; only that she had a somewhat classic profile and mouse colored hair.

He went upstairs to see that a gust of wind hadn't taken the rail off prematurely. It hadn't.

Ellen had placed a small table by the balcony door. On it were two candles in silver holders, two wine glasses inverted on linen napkins, and a gift-wrapped package. A tag on the package said: *To Dearest Jack on our first anniversary. Love, Ellen.*

He'd forgotten to get her anything. He would tell her it was something he couldn't get delivery on until tomorrow.

He took a fresh pint of Scotch with him when he left the house.

THE BINGO HALL WAS A BARNLIKE PLACE PACKED TO THE

walls with tables and people. Jack chose a table near the door where he could slip out easily to his bottle in the car. He bought some bingo cards, but soon found it impossible to concentrate on the game due to his state of mind and the load of booze he was carrying, so he ignored the calls of the woman at the microphone. She was on a stage at the far end of the room. At the front of the stage, bustling amongst the prizes was Ellen and a woman in blue, who was probably Ellen's friend from Boston. Seeing her made Jack vaguely uneasy, which in turn made him angry at himself. *How many Julies in Boston for chrissake?*

Late in the evening a man entered and seated himself at the table nearest the exit. He had a thin mustache and was wearing a gray suit.

Jack kept his back to the newcomer. If he was the man who had come to his house today, was it crazy to think that he might be, as Ellen had jokingly suggested, a private eye or plain-clothes dick. Probably, but there was always the possibility he was a process server. In any case he didn't want to see the guy tonight, not even if he was a buyer for Cromwell's house.

Now they were selling Ellen's blue cards. The microphone lady was saying, "Remember, when you have uncovered a word, call 'bingo' and get your card checked."

Ellen joined the women who were peddling the cards. Suddenly Jack discovered that the woman in the blue dress who had been on the stage with Ellen was standing beside him urging him to buy a card.

He bought one without looking up at her. As she turned away he glanced at her face. That symmetrical profile could be Julie Ferguson's!

He shook his head — get the wooliness out of his brain and stop imagining things. The woman wasn't Julie Ferguson.

He looked at his card and saw blearily that the tab in the center was marked *free*. He opened it and exposed the letter Y. He thought immediately of royal — the Royal Motel and Francine, her arms about him murmuring words of love. Passionate demanding words.

All he had to do was calm down, not drink anymore, and in a couple of hours it would be all over. He would be free. Francine and he would have the world to themselves.

It soon became apparent that the blue cards were causing some confusion; several people would call *bingo* at the same time. The microphone lady had to stop calling, and wait for the cards to be checked. "Hurry, girls," she said. "We have to be out of the hall by midnight."

One of the strolling women was examining the card of a man at Jack's table.

"It's a word all right," the man was saying. "R.O.T.O.R. rotor."

Jack stiffened. Julie's words, spoken three years ago sputtered in his brain like firecrackers:

..... rotor the part that rotates.

Jack calmed himself; no use getting stirred up over a coincidence. Now if the card had been planted on him —

How had Ellen thought of that rather obscure technical term anyway?

He heard Julie Ferguson again: *Words fascinate me.*

And Ellen today: *Julie was especially interested in my words.*

He looked about the room and spotted Ellen and Julie together. They were some distance away, but he was sure they were both looking directly at him.

Were they playing games with him? Watching for his reaction when he found the word on *his* card?

He glanced instinctively toward the open exit door. The man in the gray suit was just outside, leaning against a car, a cigarette dangling below his thin mustache.

Waiting.

The room seemed to be closing in — stifling him. The air was dead — unbearably hot — the noise outrageous. He had to get out of here, but first —

The card was like a letter bomb on the table. He seized it and opened all the tabs.

Stay calm. Rise. Move quietly between the tables. Walk, don't run to that door leading into the corridor. There will be a rear exit or a window.

The man in the gray suit tossed his cigarette down and hurried into the building, his eyes on Jack.

Jack ran down the corridor, through a kitchen, and out a service door. He sprinted across the parking lot to his car, started the motor and roared into the street, arcing wildly over against the opposite curb before straightening out and pressing the accelerator to the floor.

Immediately pulses of red light from behind swept through the interior of his car.

A patrol car had had him staked out of course.

He was no longer capable of rational thought. That there was anything elaborate and pointless about using the bingo hocus-pocus to

trap him never entered his head.

Over and over the police siren seemed to scream the word he had uncovered on his bingo card.

Kayak — kayak — kayak . . .

AFTER THE BINGO GAME ELLEN INVITED JULIE — WHOSE surname was not nor ever had been Ferguson — to the house to meet Jack.

After discovering Jack had not preceded them home, Ellen surmised that he had forgotten the wine for their anniversary and had gone to the liquor store to get it.

Over coffee Ellen said, "I must show you a letter I got today. I didn't take time to read it while you were here."

Mystified by the tears brimming in Ellen's eyes, Julie McCall Graham waited impatiently while Ellen left the room and returned with the letter.

"It's from an Avery Mitford, a neighbor of Jack's in Pittsburgh. He had only recently learned Jack's address here. It was addressed to both of us; perhaps he thought Jack would be too modest to tell me about it. Why don't you read it for yourself?"

After reading the letter, Julie said, "What a heroic act. Even to venture out in the canoe must have been a frightening experience for a person with such fear of the water."

"Yes," said Ellen, "and he never breathed a word of it to me. Just said that she drowned in a boating accident."

"I suppose Mr. Mitford knew Jack would be like that, and he wanted both of you to know there was actually a witness to his heroic performance."

"I assume so. Isn't it ironic that the Ferguson woman had no idea she had witnessed a tragedy till she visited the Mitfords last week?"

"I suppose it was seeing the woman nude that caused her to assume they were just a couple disporting themselves in the water."

Ellen said, "It was rather decent of her, not wanting to eavesdrop and backing her car out just as — how did she put it — the man swung the canoe paddle out playfully for the woman to catch hold of."

She glanced at her watch. "I can't understand what is keeping Jack."

THE FIRST COP SAID, "WHAT DO YOU SUPPOSE HE WAS RUNNING from? Barreling out into the street like that."

"Whatever," said the second cop. "It won't matter to him any more. Not after hitting a concrete pillar at ninety per."

THE MAN WITH THE THIN MUSTACHE AND WEARING THE gray suit had left the bingo hall in disgust. He wasn't going to waste another day trying to track that realtor down.

WHEN JACK HADN'T ARRIVED AFTER THIRTY MINUTES ELLEN began to worry. To divert her Julie said, "The bingo benefit was apparently a success."

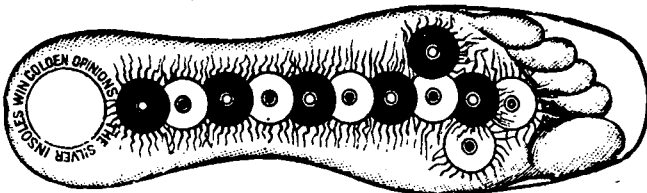
"Yes, except things got a little out of hand with my blue cards. I was told there might not be very much time left to sell the blue cards, so I thought it would speed things up if I made a lot of cards in which the word would appear as many times as possible."

"So you —"

"Yes, I went a little too far with the idea. It was a madhouse — All those people with their *tenets*, *levels*, *rotors*, *radars*, *kayaks*." Ellen sighed. "And to think I worked hunting up those palindromes as though my life depended on it." ●

from THE CRIME FIGHTER'S CATALOG

Dr. Watson's Electric Insoles



When the game is afoot, a private detective has to do a lot of legwork, sometimes being on his feet hours at a time. Most shamuses cannot afford orthopedic footwear, particularly since some of a detective's trails lead him through rivers of rain, blood, and even less savory substances which would soon destroy the fine leather of an expensive pair of shoes. The solution? Obtain a pair of Dr. Watson's Electric

Insoles for Insertion into the cheap, shoddy, everyday gumshoes normally worn by the average, seedy private eye. Inventor of the electric insole was a detective himself, Sherlock Holmes, who allowed his longtime friend and colleague, Dr. John Watson, to produce the insoles while the great detective himself retired to beekeeping in Sussex.

It was a dangerous mission, but Joe owed it to his brother. Benjy deserved a new pair of legs!

The Tinker's Legs

by JEAN DARLING

AS USUAL, BENJY FUREY FELT SHAME EACH TIME A TOURIST dropped a coin into the upturned cap that lay on the pavement where his two feet should have been. Begging was women's work, women and young children. Able bodied men asked nothing from anyone — except their wives. Tinker men drank spirits and bandied lies while the women ranged the streets crying: "A penny for the baby and God bless you," followed by an importuning brood.

Benjy wished they would all shut up, especially his mother who was accosting camera-carrying couples on the Promenade. He wished the blind accordionist would bid his two good legs carry him elsewhere to play his music; it wasn't good business — two beggars on the same patch. Faced with a decision possible donors generally passed them both with purses firmly closed. How dumb, worrying

about the day's take when I'd sell my soul to be able to lace on shoes instead of padded leather cups, Benjy thought, staring at the shore of the County Clare across Galway Bay.

"I brought you lunch," a voice interrupted Furey's thoughts. It was Joe, his sixteen-year-old brother. "Though why I bothered — the rain will soon be here so." He took a hamburger and a can of coke out of a paper bag. Beside them the music stopped.

"Sorry, Benjy, you should have told me you were here," the blind man apologized as, cane sweeping the sidewalk before him, he moved out of sight around the corner. A moment later the strains of Galway Bay came faintly on the early June breeze.

"I wish he'd play something else," Benjy said through a bite of sandwich. "God how I hate Salthill," he added and Joe tucked his fine strong legs out of sight beneath him hoping his brother wouldn't start thinking about the accident again. For once, he was grateful when the clouds scattered great drops in preparation for an afternoon's rain.

"We'd best make a move," Joe said, taking his brother onto his back.

"Remember, Lad, when it was the other way around?" Benjy whispered. And Joe recalled how he had shouted "Gee-ap, Gee-ap" from atop his brother's shoulders while flailing him on to greater speed with a twig.

"You know I'll get you legs soon's we get to Dublin." He settled Benjy on the mattress in the green-painted Caravan and went out into the rain heading towards Galway City two miles inland. Perhaps the cold wet wind would blow away the memory so it wouldn't torment sleep away like it had ever since that week in June of '69 when the Flower Children had paused to share the Tinker's summer fires.

THIS PARTICULAR GROUP OF GUITAR BEARING YOUTH WAS fleeing the island off the west of Ireland given to them by a famous "Pop" star on which to build a paradise untouched by mercenary interests. But the island was too barren, the elements too harsh to nurture into a Shangri-La where these gentle creatures could dream life away, hands forever blessing sea and sky with signs of "peace."

For a week this alien band fascinated the Tinker women and children with tales fashioned from narcotic fantasy. They strummed guitars and sitars. They sang strange songs. They captured Benjy's imagination. They were so different from the people he knew with their hair cas-

cading to mingle with worry beads and Eastern amulets, their kaftans and the sweet-smelling smoke that curled from their lips; the Jesus sandals thong tied to their feet. It was a pair of these sandals that caused Benjy to lose his lower limbs.

More than anything he wanted a pair like the tall young man called Reuben wore and he coaxed until little Joe was wild with jealousy. His elder brother always had belonged exclusively to him and now this stranger was usurping time that should have been his. Time that should be spent playing with him. "Come on, Benjy, let's go watch the rats on the rocks," the child nagged Benjy whose naked toes fairly twitched with excitement as he watched Reuben pare down a buffalo hide sole to his size. "Please, Benjy, come on!" Joe tugged at his brother's hand.

"Go a-way, I'm busy now so." Benjy slapped at the child who grabbed up the finished sandal and raced off across the campsite, his brother at his heels.

"You give me that, you little gurrier," Benjy yelled, pounding bare feet down on bits of broken bottle that cut deep into the tender flesh, thus preparing it for the gangrene that followed.

THE RAIN HAD LET UP AND THE SUN BLINKED THROUGH scudding clouds as Joe paused to look down into the fast moving water of the Salmon Weir, his back to the Cathedral. How many times had he promised Benjy legs, Joe wondered. And why did he feel so responsible about something done when he was too small to know better. It had been an accident, really, and if anyone were responsible for Benjy now it was the father, Paddy Furey. He was the one who should have got them, but as long as Benjy could walk on leather-clad stumps, he couldn't understand why anything further should be done. Couldn't the young man put the drink away with the best of them as well as bring in a tidy sum just by sitting near the pedestrian tide on fair days? "Sure an' you've got the good life, lad," the father would say, ruffling Benjy's wiry red hair as his son cringed away from the offending hand.

And I keep promising about Dublin and there isn't a hope in hell of us being there this year, Joe thought. Paddy Furey hadn't taken his family to Dublin City in years. Not since the time Joe had seen the invalid supplies shop at the top of Grafton Street. Since then seven years had passed and not once had the caravans turned toward the Capital city. Too many Tinkers go to Dublin as soon as the tourist

season ends. "Too much of anything kills the goose that lays the golden egg," Paddy Furey would say, and so he would move from one small town to another, sending his women folk to knock on doors where superstition still dwelt inside the wallpapered rooms.

"It's bad luck turning Tinkers from the door," Villagers would say. Some call them Travelling People, others consider them Gypsies. Some believe them to be descended from families driven from their small holdings during the Great Famine of 1850, driven from the Gaeltacht Country where Gaelic still is the spoken language. Some believe they are the real Irish tribes with blood untainted by Invaders: Danes, Normans, English — the shipwrecked sailors from the Spanish Armada. Perhaps it is the mystery surrounding these wanderers that makes it unfortunate to close them out empty handed. Whatever the legend, a coin should always be forthcoming when one knocks at the door.

Crossing the street, Joe walked past the Oyster Bar and turned into Shop Street, deserted now in the early evening. He walked from one end to the other stopping at last in the Chinese restaurant for a meal. He had time to kill now that his mind was made up. Time to kill until it was dark enough to make off with the Honda 50 he had spotted outside the Regional Hospital. It was secured by a small padlock easily pried open with a screw driver or some like piece of metal. To this end he slipped a table knife in his pocket. The slender key on the bunch clipped to a belt loop would turn on the ignition; no problem.

When Joe finished eating chow mein, the waiter came over with menu. "Likee I'il icy cleam?" he asked, proud of his new-found English.

"BENJY, WAKE UP. BENJY" JOE WHISPERED, HIS HAND firmly over his brother's mouth. Benjy had the unfortunate habit of shouting fit to wake the dead when awakened suddenly. "Benjy, are you awake?" Joe felt a nod and released his hold. "We must be quiet, we don't want the others to hear us." He glanced at the blanketed lumps nearby. "Are you awake enough to listen?"

"Ummmm," Benjy grunted.

"Okay then, get dressed, sweaters, rain gear, it's lashing out. I'll wait for you outside."

A few minutes later Benjy appeared in the caravan door and Joe helped him to the ground. "We're going to Dublin," Joe said.

"Where's me helmet?" Benjy wanted to know. "It's not legal riding

without a helmet," he insisted as he allowed himself to be lifted on to the cycle held firm by its center stand.

"Will you ever give over? I'm lucky to make off with transport, let alone helmets. Anyway, keep your arms tight around my waist, it's all the way to Dublin we're going this night!"

THEY HAD TO STOP TWICE FOR GAS. THE HONDA WAS OLD, it's timing off. But whatever the condition, the small red motorcycle got them the hundred and thirty-three and a third miles to Dublin without mishap. It carried them through the morning rush hour traffic along the River Liffey Quays, across D'Olier Street and east to where the underbrush along the banks of the Dodder River afforded them welcome shelter for a well deserved sleep.

"I'll be back in a bit with something to eat," Joe told his brother, who was now snug inside a tent made from their two slickers zipped together. Before leaving, Joe checked to make certain nothing was visible from the footpath above. There were those who might resent a Tinker camping so close to his elegant home. Benjy could be moved by the police; then how would he find him. But no matter how he bent and stretched to look, the bank seemed empty of everything except low, flowering trees and bushes. "Be back soon," Joe cried as he kick-started the little machine.

When he arrived at the top of Grafton Street where he remembered seeing the invalid supplies shop all he found were places selling men's clothing, cloth by the yard, air line tickets, hamburgers, smoked salmon. Inquiries in these shops brought no enlightenment as to where the business had moved. So Joe went to the Post Office on South Anne Street to look in the Golden Pages.

Under the cover of dark which settled half-heartedly sometime after eleven p.m. during the summer months, Joe coasted down the unpaved road that led to the factory he sought. It was in one of the Industrial Estates that had sprung up like dandelions on the outer perimeter of Dublin City and surrounded by a high barbed wire fence. A sign near the gate of the enclosure read: BEWARE OF THE DOG in red letters above the neat logo of the security firm guarding the premises. The entire area was lit by a make-shift arrangement of naked bulbs atop poles electrified by a slack wire looped from one to the other.

Having parked the cycle in the shadows across the road, Joe tossed a stone into the tarmacked yard and waited. He tossed another and

another, scarcely breathing, so intent was he in listening for the slightest sound. But he heard no growl, no bark; no fur-wrapped bundle of muscle with lethal teeth bared hurled itself at the wire barrier. Either the advertised "Guard Dog" was a heavy sleeper or locked away somewhere by mistake.

Joe wound his hands with strips torn from a heavy cloth remnant bought in case of barbed wire. The remainder was draped along the top of the fence enabling him to clamber over unscathed except for a small tear here and there where one of the barbs tried to catch him on the way up. He dropped to the tarmac and, crouching low, he ran swiftly across the yard to the loading platform.

As he circled the factory building seeking a way of entering, Joe felt surprise at how large it was. He had never imagined the world could have so many amputees, so many partial people who needed bits added on to make them complete. He went around twice more but nothing had been left open.

On arriving back at the loading platform he found a stone and broke the small window in the door marked: EMPLOYEE'S ENTRANCE. He dropped flat, heart pounding, listening — but there was no sound; no one had heard. Encouraged by his success so far, Joe reached through the broken window and felt for the lock. It was made by Yale. He turned it and stepped into a room palely lit by the outside lights. On one wall a time clock ticked beside a rack of small cards that insisted the worker must be punctual. Furey shied away from this unsavoury symbol of a stable society as from a hangman's noose. It didn't occur to him that the footloose freedom his kind valued so highly was subsidised by the labors of 9 to 5ers such as these.

Having set a match to the wick of the candle end brought to light his way, Joe turned left and moved quickly along a wide hall, opening each door in turn. "Offices, just offices. Everyone of them's offices," he spoke out loud in hopes the sound of his voice would make him feel less alone, less vulnerable in the vast emptiness of the factory building. The boy retraced his steps.

Back again in the room where the clock ticked, he noticed another door yawned by its side. It led from the employee's change-room lined with lockers, through a series of workrooms where lengths of metal and flesh colored plastic lay in varying states of manufacture. He passed tables laden with finished sections for assembling. Further on he found the place where leather straps and sockets were ready, waiting to be attached for the comfort and security of the wearer. And

then Joe Furey stepped through a sliding panel into Hell.

“JESUS, MARY AND JOSEPH!” HE BREATHED, HEART PLUMMETING at the sight of a forest of completed limbs yearning down from above to cast wavering shadows on dim-lit walls. He flung out his hand; the knuckles struck painfully against metal. Something gave beneath the pressure. Suddenly, the room was filled with the buzzing sound of a million mechanical bees as, six abreast, feet and hands began to sway in clicking cadence at eye level. Fingers seemed to interlace, to separate, to writhe, contort, crook, beckon — tempting the boy into their midst where they caught his hair in passing, stroked his cheek with their chill caress.

Joe shrank to his knees as shudder after shudder vibrated along his spine, eyes focused on the tiny flame that leaped from the candle still clutched tightly, a prayer on his lips. And slowly — slowly — his heartbeat eased, his breathing became more regular. Rational thought returned.

“It’s a conveyor belt, the things are hanging on a conveyor belt. Somehow I must have turned something on,” he told himself, voice unsteady and, finding the switch, he turned it off. All noise and forward motion stopped. Yet the limbs still seemed alive. They still wavered and danced. “The candle, it’s the damned candle’s doing it,” he accused, watching the flickering shadows grow and shrink as his hand moved up and down. He cursed his stupidity for not having brought a flashlight instead. He wished he were back in Galway watching rats scurry over the rocks the way he had as a small child. He wished he had saved up money so that if and when his father decided they should all come to Dublin he could take Benjy into a shop and have him fitted for a pair — but it was too late for wishes. It was too late for anything except to take the legs and go. Thunder crashed nearby, he had better hurry. He had been gone a long time and Benjy would be worried.

Quickly, the boy selected a pair of knee-length legs, buckled them together and hung them over his shoulder. Hastily, he wound a length of twine around his hand and dashed through the rain to the fence. It was more difficult climbing this time with the extra feet catching in the wires. And then a dog barked and all at once Joe felt teeth raking his ankle. The stupid guard dog, he thought, kicking at the animal’s face. “Why in Hell did you have to wake up now?” Joe breathed as he thrust his body over the top and dropped in a heap on the other side. Light-

ning flashed and a peal of thunder rolled across the sky joining its noise to that of the dog who was barking steadily as though to compensate for his earlier dereliction of duty.

The rain was coming down in earnest now, drenching him to the skin as the boy tied the legs to the pillion with the string. If only the storm had held off another thirty minutes, he could have had Benjy safe behind him riding away from Dublin. Instead his brother still huddled on the banks of the rapidly rising Dodder River waiting for him to come with the legs so he could walk on two feet like other men.

He kicked the starter again and again. For a while it seemed the spark plug must have got wet. Then, the motor stuttered to life and the old cycle slithered through the mud until it fish-tailed onto the paved road glazed by an inch deep layer of water. As the bike skidded erratically along the slippery street, the boy cursed himself for not having stolen a heavier cycle with decent tires. An oncoming car passed too close with its lights on bright. Joe slowed to the curb, eyes dazzled. A moment later he swung onto the South Ring accelerating along the Canal. There was some traffic now, mostly homeward bound party goers somewhat the worse for wear. Stop lights when they caught him never seemed to change and still the rain poured down.

To ease the anxiety for his brother, Joe began to chant under his breath: "I'm coming fast as I can, fast as I can, I'm coming, I'm coming fast as I can."

He was chanting when the motorcycle wheels locked. He was chanting as he was thrown forward over the handlebars into the path of a ululating ambulance coming from the opposite direction, blue light revolving.

THE LATE EDITION OF THE AFTERNOON PAPERS CARRIED two filler items that day. The one in the Evening Herald at the bottom of column 2, page 5 read:

Unidentified man of about twenty-five years old found floating face down in the Dodder River this morning. He was dressed in jeans and a grey jumper and wore no undershirt. Both legs are off at the knee, probably amputated in a childhood accident.

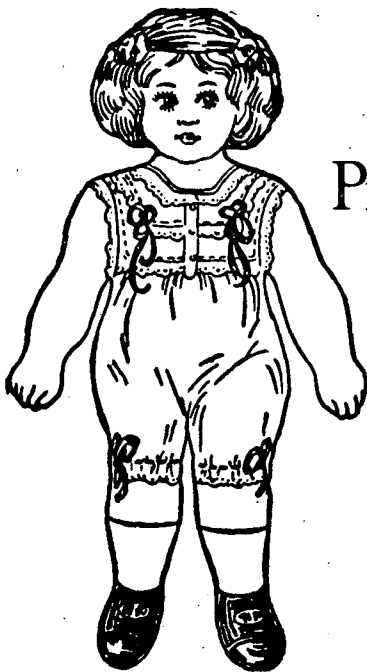
THE OTHER ITEM WAS IN THE EVENING PRESS, CENTER PAGE

three and to the left of a two column cut of a smiling bridal pair. It read:

Motorcyclist killed instantly. A youth in his late teens died this morning in a strange accident.

Leather straps locked the rear wheels of his motorcycle and he was thrown into the path of an ambulance rushing to an accident on Morehampton Road. Tied to the pillion of the cycle were two artificial legs, both of which had left feet.

from THE CRIME FIGHTER'S CATALOG



Life-Size Private-Secretary Doll

A secretary is an indispensable asset to a busy private eye, but not every p.i. can afford one. Here's a handy substitute for the budget-minded shamus. She requires no salary or time off, she will sit in the front office and not complain about long hours, and she knows when to keep her mouth shut — which is all the time. Clients are sure to remark that your new secretary is a doll!

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Willy hurt. Not a physical pain, but one that cut him deeper. He was being forced to violate his dearest principle: that he put nothing less than his best into his craft. The list of motives that could force him to cheapen his work was short, but at the top of the list was saving a friend from being murdered!

A Fine Figure

by RICHARD E. GIVAN

WILLY HUMBER WAS NOTHING IF NOT A STICKLER FOR detail. He often said that the difference between a master cabinet-maker and a woodbutcher was in his attention to detail. He embraced this philosophy with the tenacity of the hide glue he used in his joinery. It had cost him his job of twelve years with Hartford Custom Cabinets when he bucked the boss who wanted him to cut drawer dovetails for a rolltop desk with a router jig. Willy insisted on cutting them by hand the way his Scottish father had taught him — with a bow saw and paring chisels. Boss said time was money; Willy said he'd just as soon knock 'em together with roofing nails as machined dovetails; boss said take it on the road, Willy.

He did. Willy plunged into business with a tiny shop of his own in the small town of Whimsey, Connecticut. He enjoyed the artistic freedom of being one's own boss, but he hadn't anticipated the cruelties of uneven cash flow on the small businessman. He was forced to take on refinishing jobs, chair caning, and the like to pay the rent on

the shop with upstairs studio apartment. It was the all too rare furniture commissions that made his heart soar. All five feet, six inches of his slight frame was strung tighter than a harpsichord when he undertook to build fine case goods or do a carving job. Only then, after some happy customer drove off planning a party to show off his new masterpiece, did Willy haul out an apple crate of mass-production magic and start brushing on the Strip-Eze.

IT WAS A DRIZZLY TUESDAY MORNING WHEN MRS. MEECHAM first turned up in his shop. Willy felt lower than the patina of walnut stain locked in the pores of the poplar flooring. He'd just spent an hour patiently explaining his work on a simple wall display cabinet to a fat, bald customer.

"Faint plane marks are considered proper, even desirable, on a custom piece, Mr. Kroner. They prove that it was hand made."

"What's the matter? Can't you afford one of those machines that smoothes the boards all the way across?"

"Yes, I have a surfacer, but it's impossible to machine the wood perfectly free of knife marks. That's why I take the extra step of using the smooth plane," Willy answered.

"Why the hell didn't you sand it down real good, then?"

"Look at the birdseyes in the maple, Mr. Kroner. See the fire in them? Move your head when you look. See them shimmer? Sand that wood and it kills the life, looks like cardboard. That tree took ninety years to mature; I would hate to profane it in ninety minutes." Willy was fed up with the wheezing fat man. If he tried to lay his cigar down on Willy's beech workbench one more time, he decided he would take a bar clamp to him.

"Yeah, I s'pose it does have real nice grain."

"Figure, Mr. Kroner."

"What?"

"Figure. Grain is the annular structure of the wood. The appearance of the surface when a board is cut is the figure." Willy cringed every time he heard the term misused by an unappreciative client, and it happened almost every time.

Kroner finally paid up and left with his cabinet. Willy was too down to start a refinish job, so he brought the Bremman eagle up from under the bench. He found solace in carving the intricate wing feathers with his Solingen gouges and skewers. The chisels, like all Willy's edged tools, would have met the sharpness requirements of any operating

room.

He glanced up when the door opened to admit a trim woman with a refreshingly serene face and dark hair shot through with an honest gray. Willy thought her a handsome figure in her tailored tweed suit. He made her to be about fifty, not far behind his own age, and she carried it well. She stepped through the door and looked around the shop until she located him. "Pardon me, are you the joiner of the shop?" she asked.

Willy beamed. Hardly anyone ever used the term anymore. He couldn't think of a higher compliment from the graceful lady. He laid down the veiner in the bench's tool tray and brushed the chips off his leather apron. "Yes, ma'am, I'm Willy Humber. How may I help you?"

The lady's eyes darted about the shop, its walls lined with sleek tools: backsaws, marking gauges, breast drills, mortising chisels, columns and files of clamps standing at attention. "I am Ann Meecham. You certainly have a neat shop, sir, and impressive tools."

Willy's long face wore a slight smile, but he thought he would bust with pride. "Thank you, ma'am. Can't do good work without good tools."

"I hear you do good work. I have an old highboy that was my great grandmother's. I'm terribly fond of it, and I wonder if you could possibly make an armoire to match."

"Is it cherry, walnut, or mahogany?"

"Cherry."

"Well, that's good — I can get nice Pennsylvania cherry in wide boards. You can't find Honduran mahogany to match the old stuff. Walnut wide enough to look right is almost as scarce." He stroked his long chin with a calloused hand as tough as an elm burl. "Yes, ma'am. I can do it, but perhaps you don't know how much I would have to charge just to break even."

Mrs. Meecham smiled tolerantly. "You needn't worry about the price. My husband left me well provided for when he passed on five years ago. If you can create a piece to match the highboy, I will be pleased to pay you a fair price. Can you come to my house for measurements?"

"Of course. Say tomorrow at two?"

She handed him a card along with another even-toothed smile. "Perfect. See you then."

WILLY'S BATTERED PICKUP GLIDED TO A STOP AT THE AD-

dress she had left at the shop. He knew that the Heights area contained nice houses, but hadn't expected an estate like this. He passed through an open wrought-iron gate at the highway onto a blacktop driveway that should have had a route number. It wound through enough board feet of hardwood to keep him busy for several lifetimes before ending at the tudor manse. Evergreens that belonged in a graveyard reached down to sweep the lush fescue. Willy left the truck and headed for the portico.

"You got business here, man?" demanded a hard-looking young man who suddenly appeared around the corner. He carried a spade at ready arms.

"I do, if this is Mrs. Meecham's residence," Willy answered.

"Yeah, right," the man grunted through a shaggy handlebar moustache. He took an insolent step to a border of periwinkle and began to chop at weeds.

Following a few taps on the brass whaletail knocker, the massive door swung open to reveal a bored looking girl in a maid's uniform. "Help you?" she said, cocking her head to hear the strains of an afternoon soap wafting from the kitchen.

"I'm here to see Mrs. Meecham — about a furniture commission."

"Good day, Mr. Humber. Please come in," said the graceful lady as she swept into the foyer. "You may go back to the kitchen, Paula."

After a blur of oak paneling and oriental rugs, Willy stood looking at the highboy. It was indeed a beauty. Over seven feet of gleaming antique cherry separated the spiral finial from the crisp ball and claw feet. Willy didn't want to seem forward, but he couldn't resist pulling out a drawer to run his fingers over the half-blind dovetails joining the sides to the shell-carved front.

"A real beauty," he said. His voice was soft with reverence. "Made in Philadelphia about a hundred-and-sixty years ago?"

"Oh, Mr. Humber, I knew you were the man for the job!"

"The color will be tricky — cherry darkens with age, but I think I can match it up with stain. It will take a while, but if you want me to take the job, I'd consider it an honor."

"Then it's settled. Now then, won't you please join me in tea and cakes?"

WILLY NORMALLY RESENTED THE NEED TO CONSULT WITH the client during the design and construction phases of a commission, but he found himself looking forward to his meetings with Mrs.

Meecham. He returned late the next afternoon with plans he'd drafted on his bench for the armoire. She approved his concept of the design, suggesting only a move in some of the shelves to improve the balance. After studying her idea he actually agreed with her — and not only because she was paying for the job. He brought sketching materials and several contour gauges to record details of the highboy, and made Polaroid photos from all angles for reference in the shop.

The next morning Willy drove all the way to Hartford to pick over three lumber suppliers before he could find the nobility of wood that he needed. He roamed among the stickered piles of roughsawn cherry, pausing at every promising cache to smooth off a few square inches with his little block plane so he could judge its quality. He finally discovered a well-seasoned stack of wood that wasn't too wildly grained, or too plain, or had too much sapwood alongside the heart. He dug it out and loaded it on the pickup for the drive back.

He usually hated running wood through the surfacer because of the noise and clouds of sawdust that billowed out into the shop. That evening, however, he whistled throughout the chore. The wood's pristine beauty as it emerged from the machine and its fruity fragrance worked a spell on Willy as surely as any Siren's did a lonely sailor. He arranged a visit for his patron to inspect the wood the next morning — another first.

"I HOPE IT'S NOT AN INCONVENIENCE FOR YOU TO COME by, ma'am. I thought you might want to view the stock before I started cutting," he said to her at the door.

"Not at all. I had to meet Mr. Ussery, my banker, this morning anyway, and frankly, I would much prefer to inspect wood than sign banking forms. That man has been so exasperating lately with his papers. Mr. Humber, the cherry is splendid! I don't believe I've ever seen lovelier figure!"

He actually shuffled his feet from pride at the woman. "If you don't think it forward, ma'am, I'd be pleased if you'd call me Willy."

"My pleasure, Willy, on the condition that you call me Ann."

He fell to with a will on the highboy. Gluing up the panels took a day of matching, jointing and clamping. The next was spent with the long jack plane and a steel straightedge. He fussed over the slabs until they were perfectly flat. Every imagined high spot received a snick of the plane, shaving off perfumed curls. The insides of the panels received the same attention as the surface that would show on the

outside.

He sawed out the lumber to dimension, and labeled each piece with chalk that could be easily removed come finishing time. The mortises were laid out and chopped, and matching tenons sawn. Willy glued and screwed the frame, and then turned to the really artful tasks.

He bandsawed the twelve-quarter blanks for the cabriole legs, smoothed them with a spoke shave, and carved the details. The shell carvings for the drawer fronts were next. Willy was preparing the poplar drawer stock when he remembered that he hadn't ordered the brassware. He scowled at the interruption until he realized that Mrs. Mee — Ann — would have to be consulted for the selection.

SIX, SEVEN, EIGHT RINGS — MUST NOT BE ANYONE THERE — no, answer. "Meecham's residence, Paula here."

"Hello. This is Humber's Furniture. If it's convenient, may I please speak to Mrs. Meecham?"

"Just a minute." Willy heard some vague background mumbling blended with the instant ecstasy of a daytime game show. "She's out of town."

"Oh, could you estimate when she might return? I need to get her approval on a hardware order."

That seemed to call for more mumbles on the other end. "Her sister in Hartford took sick, see? She had to go there sudden-like, and she doesn't know how long it will take. She said for you to use your own judgement on the furniture when you called."

He was not happy. He had been looking forward to consulting with his lady friend, but there was something else. He had never mentioned that he would need to see her about the hardware — he had only now remembered it. He would not normally have even consulted the client. They seldom knew what they wanted, and the fewer the choices he offered them the fewer the agonies of indecision. Ann, however, was a different matter entirely. He decided to delay the hardware order as long as he could.

WILLY SPENT A BUSY WEEK MAKING THE FRAME AND PANEL doors, shaping the big molding for the top, and dovetailing the drawers. He threw all his craft into the project. Some men leave their mark in paintings, some in poetry. Willy's secret ambition was to place a piece or two in a fine museum. He was not so brash as to expect it in his lifetime, but wanted to leave enough good pieces to build the

reputation that could help to get one there. He'd just about given up on ever finding customer's willing to pay the price for museum quality, but thanks to his patron, he was living his dream for one glorious month.

The project was drawing to a close. Willy phoned his client's house again to settle the brassware issue. This time the gruff voice of the gardener answered. "'Lo?"

"Hello. Humber's Furniture. Has Mrs. Meecham gotten back from Hartford yet?"

"Hartford? What do you mean? Oh, yeah — her sick sister. Right, uh, no. She's still up there; the old girl's real sick and Mrs. Meecham has to help out so long as she's at the city hospital. She called last night to say that she'll be at least another week."

"I'm sorry to hear it. Could you give me her sister's name — I'd like to send a card."

"Her name is-uh-Johnson, Mary Johnson."

Willy was sorry to hear it. He thought his friend must be getting awfully worn down from keeping such a long sickbed vigil. He suddenly realized what he would do.

HE HALF EXPECTED TO SEE HER SILVER BMW IN THE VISITOR's parking lot, but it wasn't there. The pretty black girl in starched whites at the reception desk was quite nice — she checked and double checked, but no, there was no Mary Johnson registered there. She even called the other health care facilities in the city for Willy without success. He didn't know why he was so agitated, but he did know that he had to get the matter sorted out.

Willy parked the pickup next to a pay phone at a corner gas station. It was the third one he'd stopped at, and the first that had a phone book dangling at the end of the cord. He didn't know her maiden name, so he took a chance on her married name. He found three Meecham listings. He called the first one.

Fifteen minutes later, Willy Humber had gone from agitated to worried sick. He'd talked to two dead ends before he reached a woman who knew Ann. Mr. Meecham had been the distant relation of the family who had done well by himself in shopping center developments, worked himself to death in his middle age, and left every cent of his money to his wife. No, she was quite sure that Ann had no living relations. Some of the more greedy members of the family had investigated thoroughly in case she should pass on as untimely as her

husband and "have enough basic decency to do what was right in her will."

THE DOUGLAS FIRS LOOKED MORE FORLORN THAN EVER. The grass was a week and a half too high. There was no delay in answering the door, however; Willy could have sworn that he heard footsteps running across the oak parquet floor. He heard a squeak as the brass peephole cover pivoted to the side, ten seconds later the door jerked open."

"What is it now?" The gardener wore a white undershirt and a trace of beer foam on his black moustache.

"I was passing by and I wanted to mail a sympathy card to Mrs. Meecham's sister, but I forgot the details. Did you say the Hartford City Hospital?"

"Yeah, I did."

"And Mary Jones was the name?"

"I said Mary Johnson."

"Yes, now I remember. One more thing, I could really use a quick look at the highboy to sketch the details of the tall finial on top." Willy took a step as if to enter the hallway; the gardener stepped quickly to block him.

"Look here, man. You're getting to be a real pain. When the lady gets back, I'll tell her you were here. Until then, I don't want you nosing around anymore!" He stood glowering at Willy with his chin outthrust and his blocky shoulder muscles pumping before slamming the door.

Willy trudged out to the truck. He fired it up loudly to let the gardener know that he was leaving, and then backed into the lane leading alongside the house around to the garage. He backed farther than necessary, far enough to see through the open garage door that a silver BMW was parked inside.

THE DISPATCHER WALKED WILLY STRAIGHT INTO THE Chief's office. It wasn't so much that he considered his complaint that important, just that Whimsey's police force only had six men on the day shift, and the other four were all on patrol on various beats around town. "Chief, got a man here who thinks his friend is in trouble."

Willy quickly outlined his suspicions to Chief Ramsey, but saw that Ramsey's eyes stayed focused on the stacks of papers on his desk. "So, while I don't have any hard evidence of crime, I sure would

appreciate it if you would check it out."

"Well now, Mr. Humber, I'll keep my eyes open, but I don't think there's any call to go busting out there right now. I mean, unless there's a report from someone in the house, or some other concrete facts, we can't do anything. We need probable cause before we can legally search private property." His eyes wandered back to the mounds of papers. "We sure do appreciate your concern, though."

"But, Chief, if I'm right, Mrs. Meecham's life could be in danger!"

Ramsey tore his bushy eyebrows loose from the document titled *Budget Appropriations For Current Fiscal Year* and fixed Willy with the glower that could wilt a felon at twenty yards. "Look here, mister. This ain't no collection agency. If Mrs. Meecham is avoiding you in some hassle over paying your bill, that's a civil matter. I get paid to catch criminals and keep the peace. I've got to go up to the City Council in twenty minutes and convince them that we can't do either one very well if they cut our budget for next year. Now thank you and good day."

IT TOOK WILLY THREE HOURS TO CARVE THE SPIRAL FLAME finial — twice what it should have. He almost forgot to drill a center hole for the three-eighths inch dowel to mate it to the top of the armoire, an old practice which allowed the removal of the finial during movement of the case to protect the slender ornament from damage. Despite Chief Ramsey's assurances, he remained suspicious. He studied the facts like a blueprint of construction plans. No matter which elevation he examined, the pieces added up to some sort of criminal mischief. He had to do something.

He tried to remember the last conversation he'd had with Mrs. Meecham. It was the day she saw the cherry stock when she stopped by on the way to . . . where was it? The bank! Not likely to shed any light, but he was willing to grasp at any straw at this point.

THE FIRST NATIONAL BANK OF WHIMSEY WAS BUSY FOR A Thursday afternoon. Willy banked at the town's only competitor and wasn't familiar with the layout. He was debating which line to try when he caught the eye of a young lady lurching across the floor on heels that strived to meet her long brown hair. She noted his puzzlement and tacked a new course to meet him.

"Could I help you, Sir?" she said wearing her duty smile.

"Thank you, Miss. I'm trying to locate a man who works here —

I can't remember his name — something like Unser."

"Mr. Ussery?"

"That's him."

"He's one of our vice-presidents and trust officers. Come this way, please."

Willy followed her across the lobby, wondering if he would complete the voyage without getting seasick. She moored him in a leatherette waiting chair outside a glass cubicle. Willy reflexively scanned its frame construction as he settled into it. Crummy dowel joints, he thought.

"Mr. Ussery will be with you as soon as he is off the phone."

Willy felt out of place in his chambray shirt, khaki work pants and scarred work shoes. He had no idea what he was going to ask Ussery, or whether the banker would even talk to him. He knew he wouldn't discuss his client's private business with a stranger, but he resolved to follow up this last lead.

Ussery's secretary ushered him into the office. The tall, red-faced VP had the sort of healthy ruddiness that Willy associated with the golf course. He started to rise when he sensed a client entering, but when he looked up to see Willy, stayed seated. "Yes, what is it?" he asked his secretary.

"I'd like just a minute of your time, Mr. Ussery," said Willy. "It's about one of your clients — Mrs. Meecham." Willy was startled to see the effect on Ussery; he thought she must be wealthier than he believed.

Ussery's hand stole across the desk to a neat stack of papers in an open manila folder. Willy's eyes were drawn to them, and he saw that the caption of the top document read "POWER OF ATTORNEY;" and below that "Comes Ann Wade Meecham, Whimsey, Greene County, Connecticut, and appoints Thomas Ussery, . . ."

Ussery looked distressed and snatched up the folder. He picked it up, and marched out the door, hurling Willy a "Sit down, be right back," over his shoulder. Willy did sit down, but only after he peeked at the desk calendar. He saw nothing that made sense on the current page, took a chance in flipping to the next page, and saw an entry in the 10:00 slot that read "stock liquidation meeting — Meecham house." Willy took a seat across from the oak-veneered desk.

Ussery was more composed when he returned. "What is the nature of your business Mr. . . ."

"Humber. Of Humber's Fine Furniture. I am doing business with

Mrs. Meecham, but more importantly, I'm a friend. It's difficult for me to explain, but I have reason to believe that she might be in some danger."

"And what do you expect from me?"

"Possibly some information. Have you seen her in the last few weeks, or have any reason to know of her whereabouts?"

"Well, I guess it's no secret — in banking circles at least — that Mrs. Meecham is selling off her stock portfolio. As a trust officer administering her late husband's trust, I am charged with a fiduciary duty to attend to all details of financial maintenance."

Willy put on his "aw shucks" look, and said, "How's that?"

Ussery smiled expansively and leaned back in his naugahyde swivel/recliner. "I take care of her money matters. At least I did until she decided to sell all her investments for cash. I was naturally concerned about the soundness of her decision, but she insisted. Of course, it's her prerogative, so I carried out her instructions."

"Any ideas why she's selling out?"

"None and it would not behoove me to discuss them if I did. All I know is that she has given me verbal sell instructions, and after she signs the necessary forms, my interest in the matter will come to an end."

The banker went to his feet and extended his hand in a clear gesture of dismissal. "I hope that I've been able to help you, Mr. Humber."

WILLY JUST DID NOT KNOW. THE TRUTH WAS, HE WAS NOT in the practice of worrying about people. He had never wedded, except to his craft. He had no close relatives. He had long ago given up on a family apart from his tools.

He began to conceive a plan, a desperate and chancy plan. If he were wrong about Mrs. Meecham, he would be at best a fool, and while Willy might not have much in the way of worldly wealth, he did have self-respect. Then he thought of the consequences should he be right about Mrs. Meecham, and he knew that he had no choice.

He threw himself again into the armoire. He hated working under deadline conditions, not because he shrank from hard work, but because time pressure caused mistakes. No matter, he thought, something more important is at stake.

He mounted the doors with the brass hinges he'd been forced to order without approval. The pulls for the drawers in the base cabinet were quickly installed. The shelves were already housed in stopped

dados cut in the upper section; they were no trouble to pull since the quarter-inch cherry plywood hadn't yet been screwed to the back.

The biggest task was the finish. He stirred up a stain of water soluble pigments, operating from experience and intuition to guess at a match for the lovely cherry patina. He sprayed it on for the sake of time. There was no way to hurry the drying time so he laid down on the cabinetmaker's bench, afraid that if he went upstairs to bed, he might lose his nerve. At three in the morning he shot the first coat of sanding sealer, at five, a coat of lacquer. It pained him to rush the finish so — the armoire had turned out beautifully even to Willy's critical eye, except for the finish, which he likened to a freshly plowed field. He vowed to spray four or five more lacquer coats, with proper sanding in between and a final rubdown with pumice and rottenstone if he ever got the opportunity.

The shop window framed the rising sun as Willy woke the Butterfield brothers with a phone call. They did some part-time logging in the area for him. Hal probably would have hung up had he not been too sleepy to think of it. By the time it occurred to him, Willy'd won his attention by offering them fifty bucks each for an easy hour's work. Hal said that he and Charlie would be there at 8:00 even if he had to jerk him out of bed with a log chain. Willy dragged himself upstairs for a shower, clean clothes, and a big plate of scrambled eggs.

"You sure you want to do this?" asked Charlie Butterfield while he rubbed his craggy forehead with a hand that could palm a medicine ball. He was the baby of the family. The two of them together constituted a moderate crowd.

"I've asked myself the same question a few hundred times already," said Willy, "and so far the answer's come up yes."

"You're the boss," said Hal, fingering the five twenties. "One package, one delivery. We'd better hustle if you want this crate to get there on time."

"Right," said Willy. He gave the piece one last look and noticed the finial still perched on top. "This comes off first." He removed the finial along with the supporting dowel. "Do it, boys."

THE MEECHAM HOUSE DOOR OPENED TO REVEAL THE GARDENER with an unhappy expression. "Got a package for you, Mac," said Hal.

"Hold it. I can't accept no furniture now — nobody said anything about a delivery."

Charlie glanced at an invoice for a carton of screws that Willy had scrounged back at the shop and shoved it deep in his back pocket. "Says right here 'delivery confirmed — Friday, June twentieth'." Hal had the steady ropes untied from the armoire.

The gardener advanced toward the Butterfields, then seemed to think better of it. "What the hell. Leave the damn thing. Won't matter anyhow."

"Two, three, heave!" said Hal. They packed it through the entry hall into the living room and set it down gently. "This sucker's really built solid. I reckon you better get help before you go to move it upstairs."

"I ain't going to make no moves, you turkeys," muttered the gardener at the departing pickup, "except to Mexico."

THE CHIMES RANG AT TEN ON THE DOT. THE MAID OPENED the door to admit Thomas Ussery in a gleaming navy pinstripe. "Good day. I believe Mrs. Meecham is expecting me."

"Yessir, she certainly is. Won't you please sit down and I'll tell her you're here."

Paula returned shortly with her mistress and the gardener, who said, "Hello. Mrs. Meecham has been feeling poorly lately, and I've been sticking kind of close to her in case she has another of her fainting spells."

"Oh, I am sorry to learn you're not perfectly well. I do hope you recover soon."

"Yes, thank you Mr. Ussery. I have a feeling that the near future will determine my recovery."

The gardener moved closer and took a firm grip on her arm. He steered the group over to a low mahogany game table sitting close to the huge cherry armoire that his employer looked at with surprise. "Maybe we should get down to business; Mrs. Meecham tires quickly."

Ussery smiled his agreement and spread out a sheaf of papers from his briefcase. "We in the trust and legal departments have been very busy ever since you called with your surprise, Mrs. Meecham. But I think you'll agree that we've done a remarkable job liquidating your holdings in such a short time. Once your man-servant delivered the signed power of attorney, we were able to take care of everything. Now, you sign these six documents, along with your employees as witnesses and I am authorized to release your cashier's check for the

full amount. Of course, I sincerely hope that you will consider depositing it in your account right back at the bank, heh-heh." He rolled his pale eyes. "Mr. Weems, the president, made me promise to tell you that."

Mrs. Meecham sat slowly shaking her head as she stared at the papers before her. She seemed to gather her strength and burst out, "I shall not allow you ingrates to rob me in my own home! Help me, Mr. Ussery! Help me get away from them!"

The banker's face went hard, but that was the only move he made. The gardener leaped to his feet as he ripped an ugly .38 snubnose revolver from his jacket pocket. "You just couldn't do it the easy way, old woman! That's fine with me — I never wanted to leave any witnesses anyway."

He held the gun to cover them as he backed up for a better angle. He was nearly back to the armoire when a booming crash filled the room. The double framed doors flew out and struck the gardener's back, knocking his beefy body to the Persian carpet. Willy Humber skipped down from the empty top section and scrambled over to pick up the revolver from the floor next to the dazed young man.

Willy showed them a lopsided grin. "Sorry to bust in on you like that, ma'am, but I wanted to explain why I didn't finish the inside of your armoire." He walked slowly around the armoire to the banker and handed him the gun. "Would you be so kind as to hold this for a minute?"

Willy hurried back to the gardener who was showing signs of stirring. He bent over him, fished a length of nylon cord from his pocket, and began to tie his hands behind his back.

Mrs. Meecham was the first of the group to recover her tongue. "Oh, my dear Mr. Humber — your magnificent armoire and you are both welcome in my house anytime!"

Paula regained her speech next, as Willy stood up after the hand-tying job was done. She gaped at the banker and yelled, "What are you waiting for, fool? Shoot him!"

The banker looked at her dumbly and at the revolver in his hand. He slowly nodded his head and said, "Yes, I suppose it is necessary. I was a fool for thinking it could be done without killing."

USSERY EXTENDED HIS ARM AT WILLY WITH THE SIGHTS OF the gun centered on the cabinetmaker's chest. Willy stood stock still. All eyes locked onto Ussery's right forefinger as it began to pull

the trigger. They saw the trigger start to move and stop. The banker pulled harder and harder until his whole forearm shook from the strain.

Willy said quietly, "I thought as much, but I had to be sure." He went slowly over to the panic-stricken banker, drawing a glinting one inch paring chisel from his waist band. He put the edge next to Ussery's throat and said, "Thank you for holding the gun for me. I think I'd like it back now." Ussery offered no resistance.

"But why didn't it shoot?" asked Paula more to herself than the others.

Willy replaced the chisel in the leather scrap serving as a crude sheath. While they watched, he smacked the gun's muzzle smartly on the heel of his left hand. He lifted the gun, and a round cylinder of wood fell out the end of the barrel. "It's the dowel from the removable finial on the armoire. It occurred to me yesterday that Mister Ussery might be one of those full-service bankers — serving himself to the biggest piece. I arranged for my delivery in the furniture today because I was afraid that Mrs. Meecham was being coerced into selling her investments."

"Please, Willy. It's Ann to you. I will always be in your debt."

"When I saw the power of attorney — and how upset Ussery was that I saw it — I thought he might be behind the whole scheme."

"He was," Paula said dully.

"His cooperation was vital. Or he could possibly be dumb enough to be innocent. Either way, there was no proof. So when the gardener was out of action, I picked up the gun and slipped the dowel down the barrel so it went all the way up into the cylinder. That kept the cylinder from turning to line up the next chamber, and prevented the gun from firing." Willy herded Mr. Ussery and Paula over to sit next to the gardener.

"You're a remarkable man," said Mrs. Meecham. "They kept me prisoner in my own upstairs bedroom. I'd given up all hope when I saw them dig a deep hole in the perennial garden out back. I heard them laughing and joking about whether I'd send up shoots next spring. I owe you for my life, Willy, not to mention that beautiful armoire."

"You know, it's funny, but when I was locked up so long in my bedroom I decided that if I ever got out alive, I would see that some beautiful objects were created that would survive me forever. I can't think of anything more beautiful than furniture as you craft it. Would you be interested?"

"We can talk later, Ann."

She looked content. "One answer I can't wait for, Willy. Why did you risk your life and your work to come to the rescue of a woman you haven't known more than a few weeks?"

Willy smiled at her as he dialed the phone. "You knew about figure."

MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAKERS

Richard E. Given (*A Fine Figure*) says:

I am a college teacher at Eastern Kentucky University in the area of criminal justice. More specifically, I teach criminal law, criminal evidence, and search-and-seizure on the undergraduate and graduate levels. I have a law degree from the University of Louisville and have practiced a little criminal law, but lack the killer instinct necessary for success and happiness in that endeavor.

I will be thirty-five years old in April. I have a wife, Betty, who teaches college math and computer science, and a six-year-old daughter, Chelsea. I do enjoy the practice of working in wood, but not on the same level as my joiner friend in the story.

I have published a few technical articles in professional journals, but this will be my first published piece of fiction.

She had never been unfaithful before but now, somehow, it seemed the right thing to do. And what of her husband? Her lover had the answer to that. "I'll have to kill him," he said calmly!

Death Affair

by PERCY SPURLARK PARKER

"GLORIA?"

When she turned around, she felt like a heroine in a romance novel. She was aware of an increase in her pulse and a warm sensation rushing over her.

Mark Boyd stood only inches from her. She counted the years rapidly. Twenty-three of them had passed since she had last seen him, but the recognition was instantaneous. Mark had been only seventeen then; tall and lanky, with a long brooding face and dark, deep-set eyes. It was his eyes that she remembered most, staring at her from across the courtroom as he was being taken to prison. His face was fuller now but the eyes were still the same, dark, penetrating. His brown hair now speckled with gray was still thick and curly.

They were kissing without her even thinking about it, as though it was the natural thing to do. And everything still seemed to fit, the placement of hands, the tilting of heads, the meshing of their bodies in their embrace. For two years they'd been the hottest item in their high school class. A wedding was assured. She had wanted a career in nursing, Mark had set his sights on business management. But the gas station hold-up ended all their dreams.

There were two in on the hold-up, and the gas station attendant had been killed. A witness identified Mark as being one of the hold-up men. Mark denied all charges but no one believed him. He'd been convicted and given a life sentence. Gloria's letters to him went unanswered and he refused to see her when she visited the prison. After about a year she gave up trying.

THEY PARTED GENTLY NOW, HER ONLY SLIGHTLY AWARE that they were in the lobby of the Edgeworth Hotel. She was here for a seminar on out-patient care. It was set to start promptly at eight. She was running a little late, and was rushing for the elevator when he had called her.

"You look really terrific," he said.

She felt the blush on her cheeks. "Thanks, I —" She started to stammer, stopped, took a deep breath to compose herself. She had often thought of someday seeing Mark again. What would she say, how would she act? There were questions she'd never bothered to answer, for the answers would never be put to use. Yet, here they were, and she knew she was definitely on unsteady ground.

"But how — what are you doing here?"

"Paroled," he said, with a little shrug of his shoulder. "I've been out for a month. Most of it wondering if you ever wanted to see me again."

"I hope you have your answer."

He smiled. "I went by the hospital yesterday, found out you were going to be here for the seminar."

"Oh, the seminar," she said, looking at her watch. It was five to eight. She had looked forward to the seminar for months, but how could she go now.

Mark took her hand and she realized he was looking at her wedding ring. God, she'd forgotten about Willy and the kids. Eighteen years of marriage hadn't been the slightest whiff of a memory those first few moments with Mark.

"How's my old buddy Willy doing these days?"

"You know?"

"It didn't get as much coverage as the royal wedding, but I found out. I didn't want you waiting around for me, anyway. But I didn't expect it would be Willy."

"Oh, Mark, I — I'm really very confused right now. Seeing you, and —"

He nodded. "Yeah, I know. I hadn't meant to come on so strong, but once I saw you." He paused. "Look, how about some coffee or some-

thing?"

She thought about the seminar once more, very briefly, then took him by the arm.

THE HOTEL COFFEE SHOP WAS CROWDED BUT THEY WERE seated right away at a small corner booth. She had been in too much of a hurry for breakfast this morning, and suddenly got hungry with the smell of fresh coffee and bacon in the air.

"You never told me how Willy is doing," he said, after the waitress had taken their orders and poured coffee for them.

"He's doing okay. He works hard for me and the kids. He owns a small fix-it shop. Lawn mowers, snow blowers."

Mark nodded. "I know, I've walked passed the place a couple of times. Almost went in, but I wanted to see you first. Find out just how things were."

"Why do I feel you know everything before I tell you?"

He reached across the table, his hand engulfing hers. "I'm sorry. I had a lot of years I had to catch up with. I checked in with a lot of people, asked a lot of questions. It's a little crazy, but I thought, maybe you and me — " He straightened, cleared his throat. "You've got three kids?"

"Yes," she said trying some of the coffee. "Chris, Ellen, and Joseph. Sixteen, fifteen and ten."

"I remember when we used to talk about having kids."

"You wanted a house full."

"I didn't want no kid of mine to grow up without having brothers and sisters. Being an only child can get kind of lonely at times." He toyed with the handle of his coffee cup. "Both my folks are gone. Pa just last year."

Mark's mother had passed away that first year he was in prison. Gloria attended the funeral, but she had lost track of his father in the years since.

"I'm sorry," she said. It wasn't enough, but it was the only thing she could think of just then.

"Yeah, well, there're some things that can't be changed. I've done my time in prison. I can't erase those years, they'll always be with me."

"But you're out now. And you're still young enough to do most anything you want."

"I do have a few things in mind," he said.

The waitress brought their breakfast and Gloria welcomed the interruption. She was still very confused. Her emotions and common sense

were getting tangled. Sitting across the small table from Mark, half the time she wanted to be in his arms again, and the other half she wanted to run away. What of Willy and the children? She loved her family. No parent could be prouder of their children, they had never given her an instant of real trouble. And Willy, he was the ideal husband and father. He put in long hours at the shop, but he always had time for her and the kids.

She and Willy had just sort of gravitated toward each other, both being close friends of Mark's. And when Willy had asked her to marry him, she'd said yes more out of a feeling of emptiness in her life, than of true love. But a love had developed over the years. A love based on trust and mutual dependents. A strong love. A love she'd thought could not be shaken.

She wasn't so sure now.

"I was a heller when I was first thrown in prison. At one time I held the record for solitary confinement." He shook his head. "It was dumb. I kept causing myself more trouble, but I felt cheated. It wasn't until I learned you and Willy had gotten married that I kind of straightened myself out. I wasn't going to try and jail break and be running the rest of my life. A chance for a parole was the only thing I still had going for me. It took a while, but I made it."

"I'm glad you did," she said. "I'm only sorry it wasn't sooner."

"You and me both," he grinned at her, leaning forward. "You know, I dreamed about you almost every night."

"Mark, please."

He reached across the table again, his fingertips barely touching the back of her hand. "We've missed out on a lot of good years, Gloria. Too many to satisfy over breakfast and a cup of coffee."

She felt herself tremble, fixed in the stare of his deep-set eyes. It was as if he was a hypnotist and had thrown a thin veil over her. She knew what he would ask of her and what her answer was supposed to be. But could she say no to him. Did she want to?

SHE LAY WITH HER HEAD ON HIS SHOULDER, IDLY SWIRLING the hair on his chest with her index finger, her breathing in rhythm with his. They were in his hotel room. She had driven them there. It was an old building in an old neighborhood. The desk clerk hardly looked up as they entered.

She had never been unfaithful to her marriage before. Sure, the opportunity had presented itself a number of times. But she had always been able to laugh it off, to ignore the advance. But this was so

completely different. It was as though here with Mark was where she belonged, and her marriage to Willy was the unfaithful part.

"I'm going to kill him," Mark said calmly.

She had been able to hear the sounds of traffic on the street below, the barking of someone's dog. But all that was shut out now as Mark's words echoed in her ears.

"I have to do it, there's no other way. He deserves it, for trying to take you from me. And for letting me go to prison by myself."

"What?"

"He didn't tell you? I really didn't think he would. Yeah, it was my old buddy Willy who killed that gas station attendant. My good ol' buddy who let me take the rap all by myself. I started to tell the cops, then I thought better of it. It would be more satisfying if I even things out between us personally."

She was in a nightmare now, snatched from the comforts of an idealistic cloud and flung into the fires of hell.

"I have it all planned. I've thought it out over and over again. I'll do it tonight." He cupped her chin so she was facing him, winked, kissed the tip of her nose. "I'm going to need your help to set it up."

WHEN SHE GOT HOME WILLY WAS IN THE KITCHEN BY THE stove. She sniffed the air, he shrugged.

"Frozen pizza. It was the only thing I figured I had a chance of getting right."

"Where's the clan?"

"Around," he said, adjusting his glasses. "Doing homework or something. You know how they are, they'll show by time dinner's on the table. Seminar ran a little longer than you expected?"

"Not really," she said. "I, I had a slight accident with the car."

He rushed over to her, lines forming on his forehead, his jaws sagging. "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine, Willy."

He steered her by her shoulders to one of the kitchen chairs, knelt down beside her. "Can I get you something?"

"Willy, honest, I'm all right. I just hit the guard rail as I was getting onto the expressway. I've already reported it to the insurance company. You know old clumsy me."

But she hadn't been clumsy. She'd hit the guard rail just enough to cover the original damage. She could still see Mark in the beams of her headlights. He had gone to the store for a bottle of wine. A celebration. A toast to their new beginning. She'd been sitting in the parking lot waiting for him, the motor running. She hadn't planned anything, but

suddenly he was in front of her. In retrospect she'd done the only thing she could have. She had spent too many good years with Willy to brush them aside. Regardless of the hold-up, Willy was not a killer, it was nothing that he would do again. She couldn't say the same for Mark.

"Now Gloria. Don't try to keep anything from me. Are you sure you're all right?"

"I'm sure, Willy," she said, squeezing his hand.

There was the urge within her to tell all that had gone on today. But she knew she couldn't, any more than he could tell about the gas station hold-up.

He had his secret, now she had hers.

from THE CRIME FIGHTER'S CATALOG

HOTCHA GIRL

Stakeouts — especially at night — are long, lonely vigils, dull and boring. Many a detective has fallen asleep while waiting for a suspect to make an appearance. This need never happen to you if you order a Glow-in-the-Dark HOTCHA GIRL. This little plastic wind-up beauty never needs batteries, and the wind-up key helps strengthen a detective's all-important trigger finger. The Glow-in-the-Dark HOTCHA GIRL will keep you entertained for hours, whiling away the stakeout time otherwise spent in a duller fashion.



The old lady had two thousand dollars in cash on her, and she had to walk through this terrible neighborhood. She was going to be attacked and the money would be taken from her, she was sure of it!

Such a Neighborhood

by GERRY MADDREN

MARGE MAULDY WAS A SMART OLD LADY. SHE HAD STUB-
bornly refused the man's first and second offers and now he was
paying almost exactly the price she had figured on.

"One thousand nine hundred and ninety-eight, one thousand nine
hundred and ninety-nine and," the man flashed a smile at Mrs.
Mauldy as he laid the last bill on top of the rest, "two thousand good
old American bucks."

Her veined hands shook as she picked the money up but the man,
Mr. Barber he had said his name was, didn't notice. He and his son
were already carrying Mrs. Mauldy's treasures out of the house. The
tea service Ed's office had chipped in for on their silver anniversary.
Her mother's mahogany table. The little sarouk throw rug. The hand
painted china. And tomorrow, Mr. Barber had said, they would come
back for Ed's car.

Marge Mauldy brushed at a silly tear that was rolling down her wrinkled cheek. She had no earthly need for those things. They were just something to dust and care for. And for the car, well, she couldn't drive, not with her cataracts and Ed was gone. The sensible thing to do was to get the money in the savings and loan, the one that promised a new calculator for every newly-opened savings account. She took her coat from the closet and, folding the money, put it in her pocket. It didn't do to carry money in purses anymore, not this day and age, not when purse-snatchers motorcycled every street. Not when hoodlums hung out in grocery store parking lots waiting for unsuspecting women.

MRS. MAULDY MADE SURE THE BACK DOOR WAS LOCKED and bolted before she let herself out the front. She stood on the porch for a moment, a tiny bit reluctant to go farther. The air was heavy with exhaust fumes. The nearby hills were dingy with smog. For a minute Mrs. Mauldy was tempted to go back inside but, she told herself, the interest at the savings and loan was paid daily. Every twenty four hours she waited to deposit the two thousand dollars would cost her money.

Resolutely she went down the steps to the street and turned right past the variety store. The next block was being torn up. Jackhammers rat-tat-tated like machine guns and jagged chunks of cement were strewn where pedestrians were very likely to walk. Mrs. Mauldy gave two or three of the construction workers a disapproving glance. They stared back at her with dark, sullen eyes. Her Red Cross comfort-shoes moved rapidly and she soon left them behind.

On Woodland, under the Al's Shoe Repair sign, an untidy old drunk stood. His lips moved as he talked to himself. Mrs. Mauldy was careful not to let her hand stray to her pocket. She'd read that that was a tip-off to thieves, that gesture to reassure oneself that one's money was still safe.

Down by Martin's Bakery Mrs. Mauldy began to hear shouts which soon grew into screams and then to racking sobs. The sobs got louder as two young children, children about nine or ten, one chasing the other, propelled themselves in her direction. The sobber, a little girl disreputably dressed in shabby overalls, suddenly threw herself at Mrs. Mauldy, almost knocking her off her feet.

"Save me," the child whimpered. "Save me." The boy was right behind, a toy truck raised like a club in his hand. Mrs. Mauldy braced

herself. She was not afraid. She was, after all, more than twice his size.

"Here, here," Mrs. Mauldy said, shielding the little girl. "You mustn't hit anybody."

The girl clung to her. Mrs. Mauldy could feel her trembling. Poor little urchin. What was her mother thinking of, sending her out on a day like this without a sweater?

"Now you go away." Mrs. Mauldy shook a knobby-knuckled index finger at the boy.

"Why should I?" the little monster sneered. Mrs. Mauldy pressed the girl closer.

"Because if you don't I'll call the police." Mrs. Mauldy saw with satisfaction that her threat was going to work.

"Aww." The boy glared at her sourly, his feet slowly making distance between them.

"I have a police whistle in my pocket," Mrs. Mauldy lied. The boy stuck out his tongue and then turned and bolted down the street and out of sight. Timidly the girl's damp eyes met Mrs. Mauldy's.

"I think you'll be all right now." Mrs. Mauldy patted the fragile little shoulder. "Do you live far from here?"

The girl shook her head.

"Then maybe you'd better run straight home."

"I will." The girl smiled. She was a pretty little thing when she smiled. Would have been prettier if her face was clean.

"And thanks a lot," she called, her light hair bouncing against her frail back as she ran. Mrs. Mauldy felt sorry the child had to live in such a neighborhood. She felt sorry for herself for the same reason. When she and Ed had moved to Sunnybank it had been lovely. Now vandalism was rampant, burglaries right and left. Even rape and murder. A vile neighborhood for anybody, certainly for a child.

MRS. MAULDY STARTED WALKING AGAIN, KEEPING A SAFE distance from shadowy doorways where some pervert or delinquent might be lounging. She was a smart old lady and she kept her eyes open to everything around her. And everybody. There were a lot of rather suspicious characters about. Her nerves tightened as she neared the freeway underpass. It was dark and long enough for some fleeter, younger person to catch up to her. What would she do if someone put a gun to her back? She could almost feel the cold steel nose of a revolver pressed against her ribs. Or a knife? She shuddered and quickened her

steps. A car whished by in the darkness and something hit her shoulder. Her heart beat so hard it made her dizzy. She reached out to steady herself against the cement wall and saw in the glimmer of light ahead that she'd been hit by nothing more lethal than an empty popcorn box. She limped to the end of the underpass and then stood in full daylight once again, gulping in air that was at least a little less noxious than the black, nearly motionless air of the underpass.

At last she started walking again, grateful for the little park she passed until she saw a trio of young men with black leather jackets and ludicrous haircuts, sitting on the grass.

"Probably on dope," she muttered, crossing the street and finding herself on a block boasting of porno cassettes and private viewing rooms. Ahead a movie marquee advertised 2 SUPER X RATED FILMS. And nestled between a pharmacy and delicatessen a heavily shuttered little building promised The Unforgettable Massage.

Mrs. Mauldy shook her head and decided that today at least she would abandon her boycott of the bus company. Yes, after she made her deposit she would pay the fare, price-hike and all, to return home.

AT RIVERSIDE AND PASS SHE HAD TO MAKE YET ANOTHER decision. She could proceed straight ahead, which would take her four more long blocks to get to the Savings and Loan or she could cut through the alleyways. Even though she was tired and her left shoe pinched, she decided to go the longer, safer way and was about to continue on down Pass when she spotted a neatly groomed elderly gentleman just entering the alley. He was carrying a grocery sack. Surely she would be safe if she walked close behind him.

When she had walked about fifty feet the alley narrowed. Shadowy, open-doored garages lined one side and Mrs. Mauldy thought how easy it would be for someone to pull her into their recesses and hit her over the head. She caught the elderly gentleman peering back at her. His hand disappeared into his grocery sack and she held her breath. A catsup bottle could well turn out to be a weapon. Or a bottle of ammonia thrown in her face. Forgetfully her hand dropped toward her pocket and then quickly drew away. He was probably waiting for just such a sign.

He slowed. She slowed more, pretending interest in a spindly branch of oleander protruding from a crack in a cement-block fence. Perhaps she could turn and flee the other way. Maybe she should scream. Would anybody come? Her throat was dry. How foolish of her not to

have brought something with which to protect herself. Even an umbrella might do some good.

She saw his hand slide inside his sweater-vest. The knit fabric bunched for a second and then the hand pulled out. Something metal flashed. It was a moment before Mrs. Mauldy could make out what it was. It was a set of keys. The elderly gentleman entered one of the dusky garages, opened a rear door with his key and disappeared.

Mrs. Mauldy almost ran the rest of the way and finally pushed through the Savings and Loan door quite pink in the face and breathless. The manager sat behind his big pine desk, talking on the telephone. A secretary typed. The tellers were in their places. Mrs. Mauldy felt safe at last. *Two thousand dollars* she printed on the deposit slip where it said *cash*. Then she wrote her name and address and reached for the money.

At first she couldn't believe her pocket was empty. She scratched down deep, into the lining, felt for a hole. But there was none.

"None," she cried so loudly even the manager looked up. "No hole in my pocket but the money's gone!"

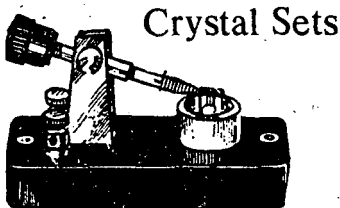
WHILE THE ASSISTANT MANAGER WAS HELPING MRS. Mauldy to a chair, two children were kneeling in a tree house several blocks away.

"You get one with a one and two zeros on it and so do I," the little girl in the overalls said. "Another for you and another for me. Honestly Louis, this is the most we've ever gotten." She licked her finger and continued counting the money.

"You mean so far." The boy folded his hand and put it in a bright orange crayola box.

"Yeah, Louis," the little girl giggled as she forced her bills through a hole in her Barbie doll, "so far."

from THE CRIME FIGHTER'S CATALOG



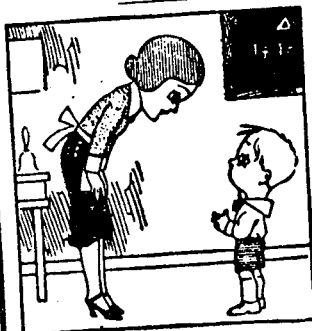
How many times have you been captured and thrown into a cell far from home in some foreign country? Probably more often than you'd like. It would cheer you to know that help is on the way, but you don't have a radio with you. Well you would have a radio with you if you had one of these little jim dandy crystal sets which can be hidden from friskers more easily than ordinary consoles.

from THE CRIME FIGHTER'S CATALOG

SNAPPY JOKES

New Collection of Rich and Rare Jokes,
Compiled by a Jolly Bartender for Stag
Parties, Smokers, Etc.

KNOWS HIS DATES



Teacher—What days of the year
are more dear to us, Willie?
Willie—Christmas and the middle
of April.

Teacher—The middle of April?
Why what happens then?

Willie—Gee, don't you know?
Dat's de time when de baseball sea-
son opens.

HOW THEY CAN RUN!



"He seems always in a hurry—
what's the matter with him, any-
way?"

"Trying to keep up with his run-
ning expenses, I think."

All too frequently a private detective will find himself in a situation where he is surrounded by villains intent upon doing him bodily harm, and he has left his own gun in the car. Well, he need fear no gang of ruffians if he has memorized some of the SNAPPY JOKES in this volume. It will generally take only a few of

these, briskly told, to have the bad guys rolling around on the floor, slapping their thighs, crying with laughter — during which time our hero can sneak past them to freedom. No p.i.'s library should be without this valuable, life-saving edition!

IN RE: REEF DIVER

CORONER'S JURY

STATE OF FLORIDA

COUNTY OF CORAL

INQUEST NO. _____

Hearing Transcribed by William M. Stephens

November 15, 1982

You are Barney T. Moss?

That's me.

And you are the captain of the *Reef Diver* . . . the vessel on which the tragedies in question occurred?

Listen . . . with all due respect. I told the police and I'm telling you. There wasn't no tragedies on my boat.

Three people are dead, Captain.

That may be true. But nobody died on my boat.

Captain Moss . . .

Let me try to make this clear. I run a diving operation. Folks pay me money and I take them out. Whatever happens after they put on their gear and go over the side is out of my hands. And out of yours, too, if I may say so. On advice of counsel I object to this hearing on the ground that you've got no jurisdiction outside the three-mile limit. We was anchored in international waters over a coral reef.

All right. We're not here to argue jurisdiction. That's a matter for the court to decide . . . if it comes to that. We're a fact-finding body. We don't fix responsibility. Answer me this. Did you or did you not take Dr. Reuben Vance and his wife Honey on a charter this past October?

I did. And like all my parties, they signed a paper releasing me from all liability on account of shipwreck, storm, mutiny, shark attack, or any Act of God.

Just answer the question, Captain. You left the Key Marina on the 27th, did you not, with four people aboard — Dr. Vance, Honey Vance, your assistant Spike Burke, and yourself? And when you tied up again a week later, how many people were aboard?

One. Just me.

Just you. What happened to the others?

Well . . . the last I saw of them, they put on scuba equipment and went over the side.

You never saw them again? All three of them disappeared? At the same time?

No. Spike went over first, and then Honey. The doc and I stayed on the deck, watching their bubbles. After a while the doc got all excited and acted crazy. I put a tank on his back and . . .

Just a minute. Why was he excited? What had happened?

Well, let me go back a bit. You see, my mate Spike Burke and Honey Vance had a little thing going when they went diving together.

You mean . . . a liaison . . . *under water*?

Well, there wasn't much room on the boat. With one cabin, a compressor and diving locker and engine and all . . . and, besides, I don't allow no hanky panky on my boat. Spike knew that.

Captain . . . what makes you think Mr. Burke and Mrs. Vance were having an affair?

You got to know Spike. Any time he's around a woman, he's trying something. That's all he thinks about. And this Honey Vance was a knockout. Young, sassy, and married to a rich old miser who spent his time drinking scotch, sniffing oxygen, and fondling his money belt.

What do you know about his money belt, Captain?

Nothing . . . except it was mighty heavy. He didn't trust banks. When he was drunk, he'd hint he was carrying a fortune in gold and gems.

I see. Now. Did Dr. Vance usually dive with the others?

Oh, about once a day he'd make the big effort and put on an Aqua Lung and play diver. He'd go down the anchor line about 10 or 12 feet and hang there a while.

Where was his money belt when he went diving?

Right around his waist, as always. Far as I know, he never took it off.

He dived with a heavy money belt?

Sure. That's no problem when you're wearing a BC vest — a buoy-

ancy compensator. You vent some of the air from your regulator to the BC and it provides buoyancy. Old Doc hardly ever turned loose the rope, anyway. He'd use one tank of air and he'd be bushed for the day. I'd help him aboard and he'd be panting and shivering. He'd sit down and sniff oxygen from his portable unit, and then pour himself a drink.

Why so much oxygen?

He was into some kind of oxygen therapy. Said it cleansed and revitalized his cells.

Getting back to the . . . alleged affair between Mr. Burke and Mrs. Vance. Did you observe any . . . indiscretion . . . any actual intimacy between them?

Not a thing. No.

So you have no real ground for believing it was happening?

Oh, yes, I do. At first it was just a guess. I'd watch their bubbles. When you're diving on compressed air, you suck on the mouthpiece and the regulator feeds you air from the tank. When you exhale, the used air vents into the water and rises. If you're at a depth of two atmospheres — about 33 feet — the bubbles will expand to twice their original size by the time they reach the surface. If the water is fairly calm, anybody on the boat can tell pretty well where a diver is, and how deep, and how hard he's working.

Really?

When Spike and Honey would dive, we'd see two streams of bubbles headed for a deep pothole in the reef. After a while we'd see one big glob of bubbles a-boiling up at the same spot for an awful long time.

. . . I see. Did Dr. Vance seem concerned about the bubbles?

Yeah. After we'd been out a few days, Spike and Honey were making three and four dives a day together. That's a lot of bottom time. The doc would stand at the rail watching the bubbles. One day he turned to me, glaring, and snapped, "Why do they stay so long in one place?" Without thinking, I said, "Well, I reckon it takes a while at that depth."

You said that to Dr. Reuben Vance?

I was only joking, but the doc didn't laugh. So I went on to say I meant it takes a while to pull a grouper out of the rocks. When you spear a grouper, he gets under a ledge and stiffens his pectoral fins and you have a devil of a time yanking him out.

A grouper is a fish?

Of course. And Spike really did bring a grouper up on that dive.

So they could have been just spearfishing? Is that what you're saying?

They were spearfishing *some* of the time. To be honest about it, I

didn't think for a minute that they were really . . . you know, really *doing* it. When you're under a pressure of 35 or 40 pounds per square inch, and you're tangled up in harnesses, BC vests, weight belts, and tanks, it just don't seem worth the effort.

Uh . . . yes. Go on with your story, Captain. What else happened?

Next day was the clincher. Honey came up from a dive with the bottom half of her bathing suit on backwards.

. . . . I see.

Maybe I wouldn't have noticed, but the doc sure noticed. He turned red and white and blue and got to coughing so bad I thought he was going to collapse. He looked at Spike like he wanted to strangle him. But Spike didn't give a damn what the doc thought. He just shrugged and went up on the bow to clean some fish for dinner. I tried to shut my eyes and ears to the whole ruddy business. What my guests do when they're underwater is not my affair . . . as long as they don't do it on the boat.

Go on.

I expected the doc to cancel the trip and tell me to head back. But the old miser had paid for ten days, and I guess he wanted to get his money's worth. Last thing I heard that night before I went to sleep . . . the doc was in the diving locker fiddling with the compressor and his oxygen cylinders.

What happened the next day?

Doc Vance seemed relaxed . . . like he'd accepted the situation and was trying to make the best of it. We all had a breakfast of fried snapper and roe, and things were fairly cordial. The doc said he didn't feel like diving, but he wanted the kids to go on and have a good time. So they put on their gear and rolled off the gunwale.

All right, continue.

I watched their bubbles, but the doc didn't seem interested. It was strange. He kept checking his watch a lot, and drumming his fingers on his chair. The stream of bubbles moved slowly together, as usual, and finally made a huge boil over the pothole. Then the water started getting choppy, and I saw a squall making up in the east, so I forgot about the divers. Next thing I knew, the doc was standing by the rail, all upset. "Where the hell are her bubbles?" he shouted. "She ought to be coming up. Where is she, Skipper?"

What had happened?

Suddenly I got a cold feeling in my gut. He was looking for only *one* diver to come up — Honey. I remembered hearing the doc messing with his oxygen bottles in the diving locker the night before. It all came together in my mind . . . and it added up to a fatal dose of oxygen for

Spike Burke.

Fatal dose of oxygen? What in the world are you talking about?

Pure oxygen is deadly poisonous when breathed under a pressure of more than two atmospheres. All divers know that . . . and all doctors, I presume. The doc had figured out a way to transfer oxygen from his cylinders to Spike's tank. Spike used the big 90-cubic-foot tanks, while Honey always wore a light ladies' model — about 50 cubic feet — so there was no chance that Honey would get an oxygen tank.

So he didn't put oxygen in Honey's tank?

No. He never intended to kill Honey. If he had he wouldn't have been so upset when he realized something had happened to her.

So what *had* happened to her?

What I figure is — Spike and Honey must have been practicing buddy-breathing . . . passing one mouthpiece back and forth. It's a technique we teach all our diving guests, because it can save your life in an emergency. In this case, though, it had the opposite effect. The two of them, I suspect, sat on the bottom, 40 feet down, passing Spike's mouthpiece back and forth, until they both had convulsions and died.

How horrible. What did you do?

Well, I can't allow that kind of business on my boat. As captain, I had to take firm measures. I couldn't prove murder, because there wasn't no evidence. No corpse, no nothing. So I charged the doc with unauthorized practice of medicine and found him guilty on the spot.

Unauthorized practice of medicine? But he was a doctor.

Sure, but we were outside the three-mile limit, and I hadn't given him permission to practice medicine on my boat. If administering oxygen isn't practicing medicine, I don't know what it is.

Captain . . . I don't think . . . oh, never mind. What happened next?

As the captain, and the judge, I sentenced Dr. Vance to manual labor — recovering my equipment, and the bodies, from the seafloor. It was unusual punishment, I guess, but I had a sinus condition and couldn't dive. Besides, the captain can't desert his ship in an emergency and leave a crook like Vance aboard unsupervised. So I strapped a tank on his back and put him over the side. Maybe I was in too much of a hurry — that squall was getting closer — and maybe I made an error in judgment. I forgot to give the doc a BC vest, and he was awful heavy. It's a shame he didn't grab onto the anchor line. He sank like a stone.

Did you make a search of the seafloor?

There wasn't time. The sea was making up, and I had to get the boat away from the reef. But I figure on going back just as soon as I can hire

a dependable mate. I've got to salvage all that diving equipment. And the doctor's money belt, too, I suppose? He *was* wearing it? Yeah, he sure was.

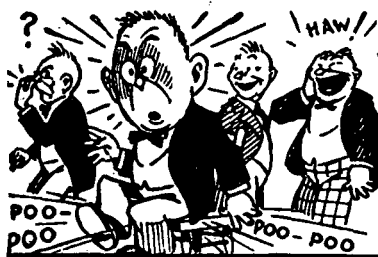
Captain, would you give this jury the precise location where all these events happened?

Oh, I really couldn't. It would be hard to describe the area to anybody who didn't know the reefs like the back of his hand.

You realize, don't you, that Dr. Vance's property belongs to his estate?

Oh, I beg to differ, sir. Anything I find on the ocean bed is mine. That's the law, any time my boat is outside the three-mile limit. ●

from THE CRIME FIGHTER'S CATALOG

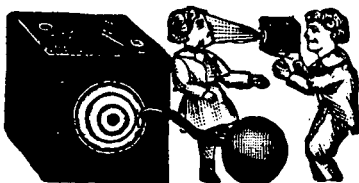


Whoopee Cushion

Quite frequently a distraction is needed in a crowd so the p.i. can unobtrusively leave the scene and go elsewhere. The Whoopee Cushion is just the item for these occasions, drawing attention to the hapless person sitting on the item and leaving the detective free to pursue further clues in some other part of the house.

What's that you say, shamus, the bad guy's got the drop on you and you don't know what to do? If you reach for your gun, he'll plug you and the bullet will go in like a pea and out like a plate. Instead, reach for your camera and offer to take his picture. Everybody likes his picture taken, even villains. Of course it's not a real camera, but he doesn't know that. Imagine his surprise when he gets a faceful of water or some other fluid which temporarily blinds him, long enough for you to whip out your own gun and put holes in him.

Squirt Camera





Stiff Competition

BOOK REVIEWS

by JOHN BALL

Very good news for mystery buffs and collectors is that the much needed and definitive *Bibliography of Crime Fiction* by Allen J. Hubin is coming back into print. The author is hard at work on a new edition, but it would appear to be at least a year and a half away if not longer. Only a limited number of copies are available, but they may be had from the Bowling Green University Popular Culture Press, Bowling Green, Ohio 43403 (Price not available.)

☆ ☆ ☆

From the same source is a new publication, *The Dime Novel Detective* edited by Gary Hoppenstand. Now with appropriate introductions you can read from such classic early series as *The New York Detective Library*, *Old Cap Collier*, *The Old Sleuth Library*, the *Bob Brooks Library*, and *Secret Service*. The stories are photo-reproduced from the originals, in minute type, but readable. There are also complete listings of each "library," a valuable feature for collectors and librarians. Nick Carter appears only on the cover; the reasons for the omission are explained by the author. A large format in soft covers. (\$9.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

A plot by the IRA to kidnap Margaret Thatcher, the Prime Minister of England, is the theme of Hardiman Scott's *Operation 10*. The plot succeeds for a while and Mrs. Thatcher plays a major role, a considerable tour de force which implies that she must have given her consent.

The story develops slowly, but in minute detail with the Prime Minister emerging as a remarkable lady indeed. Apart from a too abrupt ending, a very well and soundly written book. (Harper and Row, \$12.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

After the Prime Minister comes the President in *Trotsky's Run* by Richard Hoyt. The mole theme is exploited to the limit when the soon to be elected President of the United States is actually a KGB (Russian) agent. Kim Philby turns up again as do the Chinese communists. Despite all this, it is an entertainment and a very good one with some black humor overtones. Nothing is left out as ingenious plot complications keep unfolding right up to the very end. (Morrow, \$12.50)

☆ ☆ ☆

The usually reliable Ursula Curtiss is not up to her standard in *Dog in the Manger*. The story is elliptically told and the cast of people became so confusing it is hard to sort out who is who. A single policeman has little to do and when the killer was unmasked, we had to look back in the book to see who it was. (Dodd Mead, price not given.)

☆ ☆ ☆

Also disappointing is Kara George's maiden effort called *Murder at Tomorrow*. Tomorrow is a newsmagazine undergoing a change of editorial management with consequent complications. There is a not very convincing private eye and the two murders attract amazingly little police attention. The editor could have helped by correcting some errors in tense which detract from the story. (Walker, \$11.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

A delightful debut in the mystery field is Aaron J. Elkins' *Fellowship of Fear*, which introduces a fine new detective, Professor Gideon Oliver, a specialist in physical anthropology (as is the author). There is some splendid deduction included when Oliver makes his first trip to Europe only to find that he is being followed and attacked all over the continent with no apparent reason. Someone is murdered and the only recovered remains are a few bits of bone. "Bones!" cries Oliver and from these tiny fragments he deduces and identifies the dead man in a manner that would win top marks from Sherlock Holmes himself. The writing is very good, the story moves swiftly, and Oliver proves to be anything but your stuffy professor enbalmied in an ivory tower. He has a way with women too, especially when he tells the lady in the case that she has a very superior trochanteric subcutaneous adipose

tissue distribution. In more earthy terms, he is complimenting her on a very nice ass. An A+, and let's have a lot more of Professor Oliver. (Walker, \$11.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Deadly Reunion marks the first English language appearance of Sweden's best-selling mystery writer, Jan Ekstrom. A ninety-year-old matriarch summons her whole family to a reunion at which time she discusses the distribution of her considerable wealth. The family is by no means a loving one and two murders soon take place, to be followed later by a third. All this might be rather confusing, but the author provides a chart that sorts out who's who very nicely. Inspector Bertil Durell performs some remarkable feats of deduction in wrapping up the case. The translation is smooth except in two respects: it is overloaded with annoying double negatives and someone should tell the editor that the name of God should be capitalized. (Scribner, \$12.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Winter's Crimes 14, edited by Hilary Watson, is a new British anthology of exceptional merit. There are only 11 stories, but all of them are by top authors with the expected result. This is the kind of book to keep on your nightstand for late in-bed reading if more engaging occupations are not available. (St. Martin's, \$11.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Author Marc Lovell never forgets that it is a mystery author's duty to entertain his audience, and he does so royally in *Apple Spy in the Sky*. He sets forth the latest exploit of British occasional agent, Appleton Porter, who stands six-feet-seven and has some problems melting into a crowd. On the Mediterranean island of Ibiza he encounters adventures as he tries to uncover a Russian plot to bring drugs into British bases. He stimulates his uncovering technique by frequent visits to a nude beach, but when a lady offers to meet any requirement he has in mind, he takes a deep breath and asks for lemon marmalade at breakfast. This book does not match the fabulous ending of *The Spy With his Head in the Clouds* (hardly anything could), but it is still a lot of good fun. (Doubleday Crime Club, \$11.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

At the opposite end of the spectrum is *Inference of Guilt* by Harris Greene, absolutely the finest novel about the CIA it has been our pleasure to read. The author is a veteran intelligence officer and

absolute authenticity leaps off every page. The story deals with a very high ranking member of the Agency nearing retirement and with a health problem. There is a hark back to Vienna at the close of World War II and his activities there that are now coming home to roost. Among the significant people in this work are an over-ambitious young Turk in the CIA and a rapacious congresswoman who is after the protagonist in more ways than one. Excellent from beginning to end; don't miss a word of it. (Doubleday, \$15.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

PAPERBACK NOTES: Wilkie Collin's classic *The Woman in White* is now available in Penguin at \$3.95, tying in with the Cable-TV production. . . . Rex Stout's *Alphabet Jackson* is retitled *The Sound of Murder* in the new Bantam edition at \$2.50 The widely-known *Rose of Tibet* by Lionel Davidson is now in the Harper and Row Perennial series \$2.95 . . . Scribner's Crime Classic Series, about which we would like to know more, offers a sure winner in *The Lacquer Screen* by Robert van Gulik, a Judge Dee mystery. Don't let this one get away, \$2.95 . . . If sex and action are your thing, then try *Slow Twitch*, a Pocketbook original by Richard Enders. The nude lady on the cover starts things off well, \$2.95 . . . Another reprint, *Night of Wenceslas* will take you to Prague where the Secret Police are waiting. A superior thriller by Lionel Davidson, famous for *The Rose of Tibet* covered above Perennial, \$2.95 . . . Realism at sea in a Coast Guard cutter is combined with the supernatural in *The Jonah Watch* by Jack Cady. This one will make you feel you are really there. Avon, \$2.75 . . . If you don't know Arthur Upfield, then by all means get *The Devil's Steps* and read about Australia as no one else has ever been able to write. Scribner's, \$2.95 . . . If you have been following the horror-filled Caskey family, *Blackwater II, the Levee* is now out. This six-book series is from Avon \$2.50 . . . Dr. Mary Finney is back in Matthew Head's *The Congo Venus*. Dr. Mary is unique in the literature and never disappoints. Perennial, \$2.95 . . . Another Avon original is *Agatha's Friends* by Thomas Hauser. The lady isn't Agatha Christie, but she has plenty of troubles of her own living across the hall from a decomposing corpse. Avon, \$2.50 . . . Joe Gores' successful use of Dashiell Hammett as his detective made an interesting film. The novel is now out in a Perennial edition at \$2.95 . . . When you want a "thriller" as the British have it, then go for William Hallahan's *The Trade*. You'll be in espionage up to your ears on a grand world scale. Avon, \$3.50

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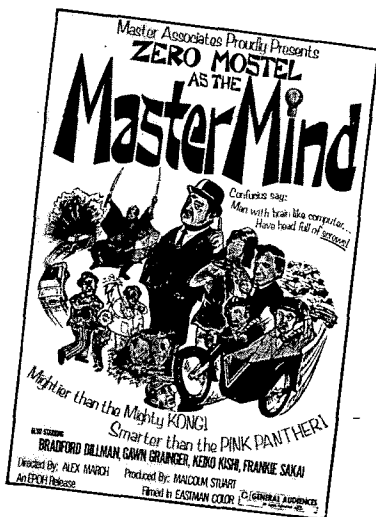
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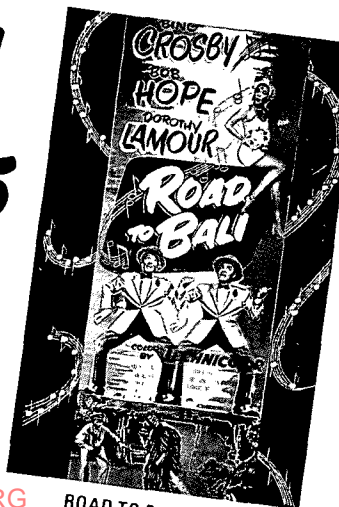


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